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1832

HEBREW TALES;

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED

FROM

THE WRITINGS

OF

THE ANCIENT HEBREW SAGES :

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

AN ESSAY

ON THE UNINSPIRED LITERATURE OF THE HEBREWS.

BY

HYMAN HURWITZ,

AUTHOR OF "VINDICIÆ HEBRAICÆ," &c. &c.

דעה חסרת מה קנית. דעה קנית מה חסרת.

If thou lackest knowledge, what hast thou then acquired ?

Hast thou acquired knowledge, what doest thou want ?

MEDRASH. 1

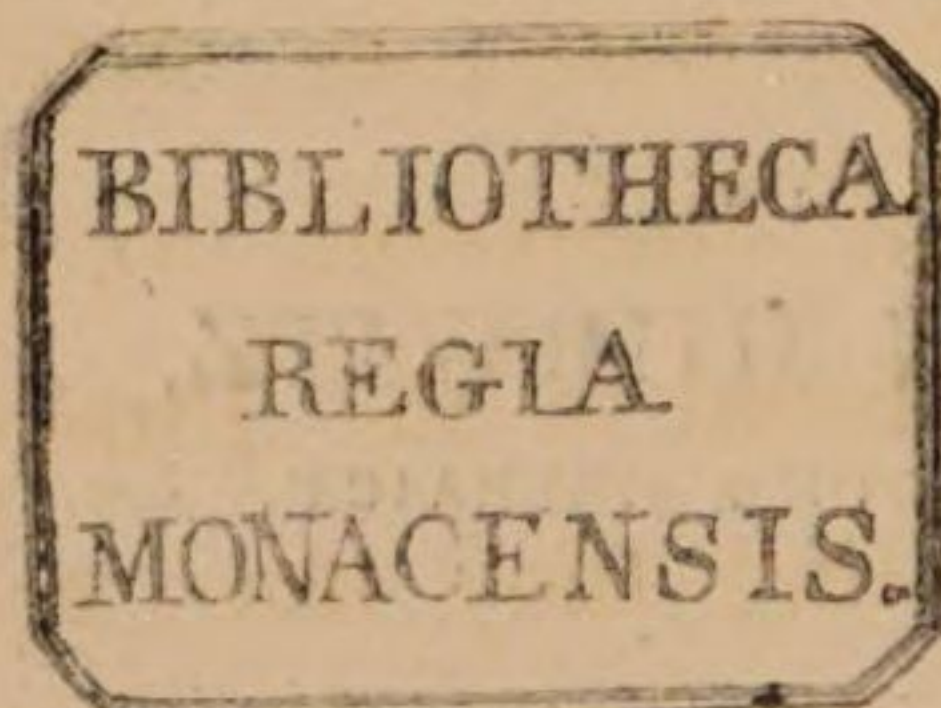
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PREFACE.

THE interesting Tales, Anecdotes, &c. contained in the following Collection, are now, for the first time, offered to the Public, in the full confidence that they have a fair claim to its kind notice, both on account of their great antiquity and their moral tendency.

They have been selected from the writings of the ancient Hebrews, who flourished in the five first centuries after the destruction of Jerusalem ; and are known to the learned by the names of the *Talmud*, *Medrashim*, &c.

Of the *Talmud*, the principal subject is the Traditional Law, and to this the far larger portion of this work is devoted. But, likewise, there are found in it, dispersed over its multifarious pages, *Sayings* and *Narrations*, under the common name AGADETHA.

These scattered portions of the *Talmud*, as well as the *Medrashim*, contain, 1st. Explanations of Scriptural texts, and the many and various ways in which the same passages may be interpreted. 2nd. Mystical, and often very curious allusions. 3rd. Philosophical opinions concealed under the veil of Allegory. 4th. Aphorisms and moral sentiments, illustrated by similes and parables, and by narratives, sometimes real and sometimes fictitious. It is to the last class, that I have confined my extracts ; and these form the subject matter of the following pages.

Excepting the three moral Tales*, so admirably translated by my esteemed friend Mr. S. T. Coleridge, and which are, by his kind permission, inserted in this Collection, I know of no similar attempt in this or in any other of the modern languages.

Selections from the before mentioned works have, indeed, been made by several Jewish writers, with the laudable view of imparting moral instruction to the illiterate portions of their respective communities; but they are written in a language—if at all it deserves the name—so low and corrupt, and they are, besides, interwoven with so many false opinions and glaring absurdities, that they have deservedly sunk into oblivion.

* Originally published in that valuable work, THE FRIEND.

Several selections have also been made by Writers of different denominations ; but these have not even the merit of good intention. For (to judge from the collected articles) the sole aim of these Writers appears to have been to throw an odium on the ancient Hebrew works, as well as on their learned authors and their unfortunate descendants ; and thus to nourish the worst feelings of human nature.

Such of my readers as wish to form an adequate conception of the unfair methods which those Writers have taken to accomplish their uncharitable views, and of the injustice with which they have treated the productions of the Hebrew Sages, are referred to the accompanying ESSAY, in which the subject is treated at large. For the present I think it necessary distinctly to say, that

the preceding observations are given as a mere statement of facts — certainly not by way of invidious comparison: and that they are not meant to apply to any of the numerous Authors who have devoted their studies to Hebrew Literature, and whose important works are deservedly valued and admired.

It is scarcely necessary to state, that the chief aim and ultimate object of this publication is, moral improvement. To render it, however, as entertaining as, it is hoped, it will be found instructive, several Facetiæ and Tales of a less grave character have been added.

In regard to the translation, I beg leave to say, in the words of the Roman Orator, “*Non verbum pro verbo necesse habui reddere.*” A literal version would neither have proved

satisfactory to my Reader, nor could I have executed it with any degree of justice to my Authors. It is the fate, indeed, of most literal translations, especially when the genius of the one language is essentially different from that of the other, that the spirit of the original evaporates during the attempt to transfuse it. But, in the present instance, there is an additional objection to this servile fidelity. The narratives are so concisely expressed in the original works, as to require a general acquaintance with the opinions of their respective Authors to understand them thoroughly. Besides this, most of them are not only frequently repeated in the same works, and that seldom without some variation, just as the immediate purpose of the Moralists who cited them might require; but they are also differently related in the several works. Now to have given the various versions, would

surely, have been a useless labour. I have, therefore, thought it most advisable to amalgamate them; adding such explications and remarks as my humble talents enable me.

Having thus given an imperfect sketch of the following sheets, I may be permitted to say, that they do not contain a single article that has not been drawn from the original sources. The labour attending such a pursuit, those alone, who are acquainted with the original works, can adequately appreciate. For the materials are not to be found collected or interspersed in one work, but are spread over the vast surface of the Talmudic ocean, Medrashim, &c. &c.

Lastly, the reader may assure himself, that in the little volume here offered to him, it is the fervent wish, and has been the con-

stant aim of the Writer, to enforce the religious and moral truths on which the best interests of all men of all names and persuasion find their common basis and fulcrum, and with scarcely less anxiety to avoid every invidious reference to the points on which their opinions are divided.

That the work should prove as useful as the motives in which it originated are pure, would constitute the remuneration, which of all others is most wished, and would be most prized by

THE AUTHOR.

*Grenada Cottage, Old Kent Road,
December, 1825.*

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ESSAY
ON THE STILL EXISTING
REMAINS OF THE HEBREW SAGES
OF A LATER PERIOD THAN THE MACCABEES,
AND
ON THE CHARACTER AND MERIT
OF THE UNINSPIRED
ANCIENT HEBREW LITERATURE
GENERALLY.

ESSAY.

THAT the accents of truth lose their effect from the lips of Indigence ; that the poor man, “ charm he ever so wisely,” is destined to find his wisdom unnoticed, and his counsels disregarded, or else accredited to some minion of fortune, in all but rank and wealth immeasurably his inferior—is a complaint repeated like an echo from generation to generation by Poets, Moralists, and Biographers of every age and country. Nevertheless, could the complaint be said to have proceeded exclusively from the improsperous votaries of science and literature ; if the needy and unfortunate were our only authorities for its justice ; it might perhaps not un-
plausibly be attributed to the natural queru-

lousness of distress, aggravated by the impatience that is believed to characterize the “genus irritabile vatum.” But what, when a monarch scarcely less renowned for his prosperity than for his pre-eminent learning and wisdom vouches for the truth of the charge? Under what pretext can we reject it as groundless, when we have it recorded as a fact, and generalized as a maxim, by *One* whose intellect an especial ray from heaven had enlightened and enlarged?—by the Man who having sought for wisdom received it in full measure with all the glories of this world as its unsolicited accompaniments? So, however, it is. The wisest of men, who to the more precious treasures of knowledge added wealth, empire, and tranquillity, the highly favoured king and sage, to whom alone among the children of men were vouchsafed glory without danger, honor without conflict, and fame for which no tear was shed—he it is who still speaking to us in the Sacred Scriptures, says:—“*This advantage of wisdom have I also observed under the sun, and found it of great importance. Against a small*

city, the inhabitants of which were but few, there came a great king who besieged it, and surrounded it with bulwarks. Now there happened to be in it a poor wise man, who alone, by his wisdom, delivered the city, yet no one ever remembered that poor man;—I hence concluded that wisdom is better than strength, notwithstanding that the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard; whereas the words of the wise, so mild, ought rather to be attended to, than the loud noise of him who rules over fools." *

The same truth, and a similar lesson, grounded on facts of the same import, are not obscurely intimated even in Pagan Mythology. MINERVA, the emblem of influence and commanding *Wisdom*, is still represented with a Golden Belt, to shew that they who would instruct mankind must commence by attracting them; or that wisdom in its own form and essence is but a feeble magnet for the sensualized many, and needs the lure of outward embellishment to bring them

* Eccles. ix.

within the sphere of its influence. In the like spirit, the mythologists bestowed on her a Shield and a Spear, as not less necessary for her own defence than useful for the protection of her votaries; and thus to indicate that even celestial truth can make but few and scanty conquests, if it have not worldly power and dominion for its pioneer and ally.

For it is not in the instance of individuals only, that merit is obscured by adversity. The same prejudice equally affects the collective wisdom of nations, which is admitted and admired no longer than the respective states flourish. Sages may still arise to tend the sacred lamps of knowledge and science, but their light shines as in a cavern, no longer beheld from afar. The literary celebrity of a people perishes, or at least closes, with the power and independence of the state: and in no nation has this truth been more strongly exemplified than in the unhappy descendants of Israel.

This nation, by universal admission, one of the most ancient on the face of the globe, that amidst the most dreadful calamities, and

under the most grinding oppressions, has still preserved its nationality—a nation which was already in possession of some of the most useful arts and sciences, when those to whom their invention is generally ascribed, were either immersed in barbarity, or just emerging from it—a nation that can boast of so many valiant kings, so many heroes, so many learned men, and of so noble an origin—and, above all, a nation whose sacred writings have conferred such solid and lasting benefits on all those that have perused them with due attention, and which writings still continue to give consolation to millions of the human race—this nation was no sooner vanquished and driven from the land of its forefathers, than its wisdom and learning became equally despised.

True it is, that by one of those mysterious ways of Providence which the human mind cannot fathom, it was so ordained, that notwithstanding the injustice—nay, I might say, the ingratitude—of Israel's oppressors, those transcendent truths which the most important of their records contain, should not be lost; nor remain unknown to the most civil-

ized part of the world. The sacred volumes were translated, read, and admired. As for the rest of Jewish learning, much of it was involved in the general ruin; and that portion which is still locked up in their ancient books, known by the names of the *Jerusalem* and *Babylonian Talmuds*, *Tosephtos*, *Siphri*, *Medrashim*, and in many other works of equal antiquity, was for ages solely confined to the Jews; who not only held, as it was fit and natural they should, these writings—"the stars of the evening twilight of their race"—in reverential esteem, but regarded them with a veneration bordering upon superstition. To them, this uninspired portion of their ancient literature became the source of much and extensive good, intermingled with many and serious evils—evils not owing to the works themselves, as has erroneously been supposed, but to misdirected industry and misguided zeal. They employed, nay, almost exhausted their intellects to explain them; and they perused them with a diligence unprecedented, and which might have been deemed exemplary, had it not too often and too generally excluded

studies more important and more sacred. As for other nations, the very existence of those works was scarcely known to them ; and they despised the sons of Abraham too cordially to concern themselves about their learning.

It was not till after the Reformation, that the Literati of Europe began to apply themselves with any degree of industry to Jewish literature. But as that important event, though it swept away much superstition from the human mind, and unloosed and relaxed the cords of mental bondage for a large and important portion of the civilized world, did not sensibly improve the unfortunate condition of the poor Jews—as they were still oppressed, persecuted, and despised, it is not at all surprising that most of the learned of those times should have perused the ancient productions of the Rabbis, with the prejudices which they had imbibed from their infancy, and for which the defects and weaknesses they detected in these works, and which the peculiarity of type and character rendered more glaring, furnished the pretext, and prejudices opposite to their own sup-

plied the provocation. Contempt was thus barbed by resentment: and alas! to few or none did the reflection occur, that they were the inevitable, and therefore venial prejudices of men embittered by persecution, and whose very miseries, consecrated by ancient prophecies gave them importance in their own eyes, and added the pangs of recollection and the ranklings of insulted pride to the sense of wrongs and cruelties, which no man of common humanity can even *read*, and not justify, by his own sympathy, the detestation which the sufferers must have felt towards the authors and instruments. “*Res sacra est miseria.*” Never was this sentiment of the Roman Philosopher more applicable, never was it less applied, than to the unfortunate descendants of Israel. Oppression and iniquitous laws entailed poverty on them. Poverty and insecurity, the necessity of a shifting, ambulatory, and almost homeless life. The natural effects of injustice and contumely were cited as their justification; and they who should have reversed the decree, gave it sanction and solemnity. The gall of the vulgar filled the vials of scorn, and the

learned emptied them on the head of the victim! And to the utmost bounds which their own creed permitted, the contempt felt for the existing race was extended (alas! not transferred) to the productions of their ancestors indiscriminately.

To such an extent did this ill-grounded contempt proceed, that the learned Mr. Wotton complained that in his time—"Talmudic learning had fallen into such disrepute, that those who busied themselves in such studies, had thought it necessary to *apologize* for so doing!" *

Above a century has elapsed since that observation was made, and Talmudic learning so far from having gained in reputation, has sunk into still greater neglect. Knowledge in general, has indeed, since that period, made great and rapid strides. Her industrious votaries have, with a zeal that cannot be sufficiently applauded, extended her empire far and wide. They have explored the mines of ancient literature, and opened sources of information totally unknown to their predecessors. But the Talmud, that

* Wotton's Miscellaneous Discourses, &c.

vast and miscellaneous work, so venerable from its antiquity, so interesting from the important subjects of which it treats, and so curious from the variety of knowledge it contains—this, as well as many other interesting Hebrew works, finds no friendly hand to rescue it from oblivion. Few of the learned think it worth their while to examine it with any critical skill; and the few that at all deign to notice it, seldom do it without an epithet of derision or scorn.

Nor is this neglect confined to the circle, where difference of descent and creed render it at least intelligible. The descendants themselves of the sages to whom we owe these treasures of Hebrew Literature,—they whose forefathers regarded these volumes with a reverence that erred only in its excess, and through a passionate gratitude, which in a more favored race would have incurred no harsher censure than that of patriot partiality, had allowed no appeal from their authority, no questioning of their contents—alas! even of these the far greater part know the Talmud only by name. The faithful satellite of the inspired code

which, with reflected light, guided their ancestors through the gloom and the rugged path, remains in eclipse even for these, by the shadow of their own neglect and degenerate indifference.

Like the luminary, indeed, from which I have drawn my metaphor, the Talmud is “a spotted orb:” and that which I have described as an eclipse, some of my readers may consider as its *wane*, nay, may interpret the dimness and decay of its fame as a happy omen, the effect and symptom of a stronger light arising. But the more I reflect, and the more heedfully I look around me, the less am I disposed to partake in their inferences or their anticipation. If a light it at all deserves to be called, it is the sudden glare of an expiring torch—generally succeeded by total darkness. Or, to use a yet more appropriate simile, it is the light of a burning heap of combustibles, consuming and destroying the materials on which it feeds. What, if by neglecting the uninspired, such men were also to neglect the inspired writings? What, if by forsaking the religion of their forefathers, they were equally to despise all

other religions?—and, ceasing to be Jews, they should become Atheists? Would this be desirable? And yet, that this is the case with by far the greater part of those that turn their backs on the wisdom of their ancestors, sad experience teaches us. Such men generally begin (after having first picked up the garbage of modern learning) with laughing, in conjunction with injudicious or infidel writers, at what they call Rabbinical absurdities, and end with despising the word of God.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood. It would grieve me even to be suspected of the folly and injustice of promiscuous accusation. No, no one is more convinced than the writer of these pages, that Israel still contains, in this, as well as in other countries, many members, who—equally free from that daring spirit of innovation which fain would tear up every thing sacred and venerable, without substituting aught that is useful, as from the deadening influence of bigotry, which has converted the enlivening precepts of the divine law into a baneful heap of rubbish, consisting of silly customs and un-

meaning ceremonies—are still animated with a laudable zeal for their religion; and whose genuine piety, virtue, and knowledge reflect the greatest honour on their respective communities. But admitting this to its full extent, it cannot be denied—and why should it be concealed—that the demon of infidelity is making strong and bold approaches on the precincts of Judaism; nay, that he has already surprized and carried off many a lamb from the once chosen flock of Israel.

The fact is certain. There are few whose own experience cannot supply some instance in proof. But what shall we assign as the cause? To what is it attributable? To the neglect of the Talmud?—I am too well aware of the incredulous and contemptuous smile, which it would provoke, to hazard the assertion. But to the causes that produced the neglect of this and other relics of Hebrew learning, and to the neglect itself as a secondary and conspiring cause, I do venture to attribute this frightful * phenomenon—a tendency to the rejec-

* This is no exaggerated phrase: and in addressing the posterity of the patriarchs, on such a theme, well may I

tion—for disbelief is rejection—of their sole remaining honor in the eyes of nations, of the one splendid privilege which the world could not rend from them, and which even their oppressors admitted and revered. Far be it from me, however, to deny, that this unjust depreciation of those writings may, in part, be explained as a revulsion from the opposite extreme of an undue and excessive veneration. It is too true, that generally and for too long a period the Jewish people placed them, practically though not avowedly, too nearly on a level with Revealed Truth; and the well-merited fame of a host of wise and learned men, who never made the least pretence to inspiration, and who, if it had been attributed to them, would have repaid the flattery with an anathema, expiates, behind the veil of oblivion or discredit, the superstition and servility of their bigoted admirers.

avail myself of words held sacred by their fellow-citizens, not of their race, while I repeat the assertion, that a Hebrew infidel, an infidel among the “Israelites to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants,” and to whom “were committed the Oracles of God”—the only open eye of the world, when all the rest of mankind had darkness for their portion, or the light of dreams—is indeed a frightful, a portentous phenomenon!

The facts and circumstances, which I have here brought together, as the causes and the occasions of the present low estimate of ancient Hebrew Literature, are sufficiently powerful, though their operation has been for the greater part indirect and gradual. They have not, however, been left unaided by hostile agents of more open character. The Talmud has not been wholly overlooked or forgotten. There is a set of writers who profess to have studied its contents ; but who (if we may judge by their writings) must have read it for no other purpose than that of preventing or destroying the wish to do the same in all other men. They took it up to find out reasons and justifications for the hatred and contempt, which they had felt towards it by anticipation, and as the overflow of the emotions, which they had previously fostered against the writers as Jews, and Rabbis. Under the influence of such feelings, and with this as their predominant motive, they commenced their researches ; and, without considering the distant ages in which the Talmud was composed, — the state of the Jews at those remote pe-

*Détecteur
du
Talmud*

riods—the character of the nations amongst whom it was their unhappy lot to dwell—the opinions of the learned of those times, and their peculiar style of writing;—they perused that vast work, or ocean of learning, as it is not improperly called, as if it had been the production of one day; and that their own. Every silly saying, every absurd opinion, was laid hold of with rapture, and exhibited as a specimen of the wisdom of the Talmudists. The numerous allegorical expressions and stories, with which those ancient writings abound, were taken in their strict literal sense. The many fictions, invented for the purpose of conveying some moral or philosophical truth, were made the standard of what the Rabbis actually thought or believed. Every witty saying, every *jeu d'esprit* was considered as a serious expression; and its authors were blamed for assertions made in the moment of mirth, or uttered only by way of jest.

Unable with all their industry to produce a sufficient stock of absurdities, these writers kindly pressed some of the productions of the later Rabbis—whose foolish dreams

the ancient Instructors of Israel would themselves have treated with contempt—into their service ; and confounded their wild notions with the opinions of their truly pious ancestors. By such and similar means they accumulated a mass of writings quite sufficient, if taken in the sense in which they represent them, to throw the greatest discredit upon that important work.

That such a procedure was, to say the least of it, very unfair, every impartial and honest mind will readily admit. For what opinion can we have of the man, who should discover nothing in the sun but its dark spots ; or who, in viewing a flourishing rose-bush, should perceive nothing but its thorns ?

Indeed, the proceedings of these Talmudical detractors can only be compared to the conduct of a person, who being admitted into an extensive garden, should, instead of regaling himself with its variegated productions, deliberately walk about, and busy himself with picking up every worthless pebble, withered fruit, and noxious weed ; and, having loaded himself with as much rubbish as he could carry, turn round to the pro-

prietor, and scornfully exclaim, “ Look, Sir ! look at the precious productions of your garden ! ” — Might not the proprietor with justice reply, “ Sir, that weeds grow in my garden may be true ; for in what garden planted by human hands do they not grow ? But, surely, that is no enviable taste, which, amidst the many and various fruits and flowers produced here, leads you to notice these alone ; even though they were indeed what you suppose them to be. This, however, is by no means the fact. In that plant, which your hasty and undiscerning prejudice regards as a weed, there is a hidden virtue which strikes not every beholder. Of this apparently withered fruit, you need but remove the external covering, and you will find it delicious. These pebbles, too, require only a little polishing, and their genuine lustre will soon appear.”

To enumerate all the various misrepresentations of the writers who have aimed their venomous shafts at the poor Rabbis and their literary productions, would require volumes. However, to enable the general reader to form his own conclusions on the subject, I

think it necessary to illustrate the preceding remarks by a few examples.

It is well known, that the state and condition of the progenitor of mankind, his mental capacity and intellectual acquirements, were favourite topics of discussion amongst the learned of almost every age; and that, whilst some have bent the father of the human race down to the earth, and reduced him to a level with the brutes, others have raised him to the skies, and given him an angelic nature. That the learned Hebrews should have exercised their thoughts on the same subject, is no more strange than that they should have expressed those thoughts in the language of metaphor and allegory, the favourite medium of oriental philosophers. Now it was the opinion of some of the Rabbis that, since according to Scripture every created being was produced in its perfect state*, Adam must likewise have come from the hand of the Divine Maker in the most perfect state; not only as

Adam

* “ And God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth : and it was so.”
Gen. i.

far as regarded physical capabilities, but also mental powers*, and that consequently, his intellectual endowments must have been proportionally great. This opinion they conveyed, in terms which appear hyperbolical†, because it is overlooked that they are figurative, by saying that *Adam reached from earth to heaven*‡:—i. e. his Being, joining the earthly with the celestial, had the animal as its base, and the angelic as its capital; or, that the man in his past perfection was framed to ascend from nature to nature's God.

To intimate that man is *omnivorous*, that the strength, pliability of his frame, and his peculiar organization enable him to dwell in every situation and in every clime, they said—“*that the dust from which Adam was*

* All the works of the Creation, says Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, were produced בְּקוֹמָתָן in their stature, בְּרֵעָתָם with their respective share of knowledge, בְּצַבִּיּוֹנָם and in their fairest form. Treatise Cholin.

† Rabbi Jochonan expressed his opinion on this subject in plainer language; for he said that Adam and Eve were brought into existence, כְּבָנֵי עֶשְׂרִים like persons of the age of twenty.

‡ T. Chagiga.

formed, was collected from every part of the earth." *

To express man's two-fold nature, the *duplex homo*, namely, the spiritual and the material; they said — "*that Adam was an אנדרוגינס Androgynes* †," (a man-woman): the former indicative of the soul, on account of its superiority and vigour; the latter representing the passions, desires, and propensities, on account of their fascinating allurements.

To express the result of this two-fold combination, they said, that "*Adam had two faces; one turning to the East, the other to the West.*" That is to say, the one (the spiritual nature) is turned towards the source of light and knowledge; the other (the material) is inclined towards the regions of darkness; the abode of sensuality and debasement.

Further, they said, that when "*Adam lay down, his head rested in the East, and his feet in the West.*" ‡ By which they meant, that though by our first parents'

* T. Sanhedrin. † Medrash Rabba. ‡ Ibid.

transgressions, or their fall, as it is called, man's nature was deteriorated, yet it was not changed *in kind*:—his head (his superior nature) still resting in the East—the source of light; whilst his feet (his inferior nature) turn towards the West.

Such were the real opinions of the ancient Hebrews. But their traducers, either through ignorance or malevolence, taking their words in their most literal sense, unblushingly tell us, that the Sages of Israel *believed* that Adam was a most gigantic two-headed monster—nay, wonderful! that he was a—Hermaphrodite!

The Talmudists have been reproached for asserting, that “Seven* things existed prior to the creation of the world; namely, *Israel*, the *Law*, *Hell*, *Paradise*, *Repentance*, the *Throne of Glory*, and *the name of the Messiah*.” † Strange as this assertion appears, it is yet not more so, than what Aristotle has affirmed concerning a commonwealth. For,

* The Medrash reckons only *six*; Israel forming one of the number. The Talmud reckons *seven*, and instead of *Israel* substitutes the *Temple*.

† Talmud T. Pesachim: Nedarim: Pirke R. Eliezer.

and פירקין — Pirke R. Eliezer

if my memory does not deceive me, he says, in his Politics—" *That a commonwealth is prior by nature to each individual.*" Now, might we not naturally ask—How is it possible for a commonwealth, which is nothing but an aggregate of individuals, to exist prior to the members that compose it?—Aristotle must, therefore, have been a fool! O! no—may, perhaps, the deriders of Rabbinical learning say; Aristotle was a philosopher; all that he meant to assert, was this: "That nature (here contemplated as a mind or intelligence) has always some end in view, to attain which, she employs the best means. Now *ideally*, or in relation to the divine Artist, the end or purpose is the first; the whole series of operations by which it is realized being the consequent of the end, hence entitled *the final cause*. And since, according to Aristotle's opinion, man is by nature a social being, destined to live in society, where, by proper discipline, he may advance from a mere animal or savage into a moral and intellectual being; it follows, that society, in which man was to receive his moral perfection, must, in the in-

tention of nature, have been prior to the individuals that were to compose it." Now, granting that this was the meaning of Aristotle—since it is an undoubted truth, that intellect acts in an inverse ratio to mechanical operation—or, as a Hebrew poet has so well expressed it, “סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה” *The last in operation is the first in thought*—we may still reasonably urge, that since it is admitted that *society* itself was only formed for the purpose of man’s advancement to moral and intellectual perfectibility, it follows, that a standard, or the idea of that perfection, must, in the intention of nature, have been even prior to society. Further, since society cannot exist without laws, nor can laws be efficient without rewards and punishments—and *rewards* and *punishments* imply a *Rewarder* and *Punisher*, or a *Tribunal*, where those rewards and punishments are to be awarded—then all these must also have entered in the intentions of nature. Now this is exactly what the Rabbis have said. They knew, as well as Aristotle, that man is by nature social; destined by his *Maker* to live in society, where alone he could, by his

own efforts, arrive at moral and intellectual perfectibility ; and that, consequently, an *idea* of that society must have existed in the Divine mind, prior to the formation of man. This they indicated by saying, that *Israel*, or the *Temple**, existed before the creation of the world : and, surely, no one can blame them for having considered their own Commonwealth as the best model of society.— But since, as we have before observed, society cannot exist without laws, nor can laws be efficient without rewards and punishments, and these cannot be conceived without an executive power, they concluded that these must also have existed in the Divine mind : and this they indicated by the words, the *Law*, *Hell*, *Paradise*, and the *Throne of Glory* ; i. e. the holy seat of judgment. Further, considering the Divine Being not only as the Judge of the whole earth, but as the FATHER OF MERCIES, “ *who delighteth not in the death of the wicked, but in his returning from his ways, so that he may*

* It has been observed in a preceding note, that the Talmud substitutes the *Temple* for *Israel*. But this amounts to the same ; as it is well known, that the Temple was considered as the point of union of the Jewish state.

*live**;" they included *repentance* in the list of pre-existing things. Finally, as all these were only so many great means for a still greater purpose, namely, the perfectibility of human nature, they justly concluded, that an *idea* of that perfectibility must have existed in the Divine mind: and this they indicated by the words *the name*, i. e. the essential characteristic, *of the Messiah* — a Being, who, according to their belief, was to possess every thing that could adorn and dignify human nature.

These sentiments, worthy of *Plato*, have yet been decried as rabbinical reveries, and their authors even arraigned of impiety! — on no better grounds than what the detractors themselves supplied, by wantonly imposing their own literal sense on expressions evidently, and (but by motive or dullness) *unmistakeably*, figurative.

With the same candour have these literary traducers treated the philosophical opinions of the Talmudist.

Rabba, the grandson of *Chana*, in order to communicate to his readers the surprising

* Ezek.

fact, concerning the luminous appearance of the sea, (observed with admiration by most navigators, and so beautifully described by my friend, Mr. S. T. Coleridge*,) and to express the wonders of God, who, by the divine ray with which he animated man, has enabled him to subdue the raging billows of the sea, by means of a few *planks* and *sticks* — related the following allegorical tale : —

Tale

“ Those that travel on the sea have told
 // me, that on the head of the wave which
 // threatens destruction to the ship, there ap-
 // pear sparks of white fire : that they beat it
 // (the sea) with sticks, on which is written the
 // name of the Almighty, and it rests, or is
 // subdued.” † Further, to explain the cause
 // of day and night, he invented the following
 // narrative : — “ An Arabian merchant said to
 // me : ‘ Come, and I will shew thee where
 //

* A beautiful white cloud of foam, at momentarily intervals, coursed by the side of the vessel with a roar, and little stars of flame danced and sparkled and went out in it : and every now and then light detachments of this white cloud-like foam, darted off from the vessel's side, each with its own small constellation, over the sea, and scoured out of sight like a Tartar troop over a wilderness. — *Biographia Literaria*, vol. ii.

† Talmud, Baba Bathra.

“heaven and earth join.’ I took my bread
 “basket, and put it into the window of the
 “firmament. I then said my prayers, which I
 “finished in due time. Then I looked for my
 “basket, but found it not. ‘What!’ said I to
 “the merchant, ‘Are there thieves in this
 “place?’ ‘No,’ answered he, ‘it is the heaven-
 “ly sphere that turns about which took it along
 “with it. Wait till to-morrow, at the precise
 “time, and thou wilt find thy basket again.’”*

“It is generally supposed, that the grandson
 “of *Chana* accounted for the phenomenon
 by supposing, according to the Ptolemaic
 system, that the heavens turned round the
 earth. But it is not improbable, that, by
 the expression, “*Come, and I will shew
 thee where heaven and earth meet,*” he in-
 timated, that the phenomenon may be ex-
 plained in two ways; either in the manner
 just stated, or on the Pythagorean system of
 the earth’s turning on its own axis †: for the
 disappearance and re-appearance of the ficti-

* T. Baba Bathra.

† That the Talmudists were not unacquainted with that
 system, appears from their saying, that גלגל קבוע ומזל חוזר—
 “The sphere is immovable, but the planet turns.”—Treatise
 Pesachim.

Astronomie

tious basket would take place on either supposition.

Be this as it may, there is surely nothing so very extravagant in either of the preceding stories, to justify the derision with which they have been cited by modern writers; who would fain persuade their readers, that the ancient sages of Israel *believed* that the violent rage of the sea can be subdued by striking its tremendous billows with sticks—that the sky and earth touch each other—and that there are windows in heaven, in which bread-baskets may be placed!

Further: the Talmudists, with a view, perhaps, of communicating an historical fact, relate the following story:—

Tale

“ Once upon a time, an egg of בר יוכני
Bar-Ioceane (i. e. the son of Ioceane), fell
 down, and it inundated sixty cities, and
 broke down three hundred cedars.” It was
 asked, “ How came the egg to fall; since it
 is written, the wing of the songster is beau-
 tified?” To which Rabbi Asci replied, “ Be-
 cause it was a foul egg.”* That this fable
 alludes to a terrible persecution which, in the

* Treatise Bechoroth.

time of its inventor, raged against some Hindoo sects who believed in the *mundane egg**, is not only highly probable, but is rendered almost certain, by the egg being described as the son (offspring) of Ioceane (Ocean.) And when it was asked, how that egg came to fall (i. e. how the persecution arose), since that egg was so beautified by the wing (the imagination) of the songster (poets) — the witty Rabbi replied — “because it was a foul egg.” And that it was not very sound, the reader may perhaps allow, considering the many fables to which it gave birth. But our pretended Critics, not knowing what to think of the *son of Ioceane*, converted him into a *bird*, which they called *Bar-jochna*; imagining, perhaps, where there

† He (the self-existing)† desiring to raise up various creatures, by an emanation from his own glory, first created the waters, and impressed them with a power of motion: by that power was produced a *Golden Egg*, blazing like a thousand suns, in which was born Brahma, self-existing, the great Parent of all rational beings, &c. That God, having dwelled in the egg through revolving years, himself meditating on himself, divided it into two equal parts; and from those halves formed the heavens and the earth, placing in the midst the subtle ether—the eight points of the world—and the permanent receptacle of the water. —Manava Sastra.

is an egg, there must be a bird: and judging, from the size of the egg, of the dimension of its feathered chick, they hatched a creature so monstrously large, as was big enough to devour the poor Rabbis, together with their bulky works: and then, turning to the Jews, bid them look at the gigantic bird!—and exultingly asked them, what they thought of their ancestor's wonderful discoveries in Ornithology!—little thinking, that this Barjoch-na was a creature of their own disordered imagination.

I know it may be said, that these writers were led into mistakes by the Jewish Commentators, whose interpretation they adopted. That this was the case, in many instances I do not mean to deny; nay, I am ready to admit, that the Commentators, from not being sufficiently acquainted with profane learning, have, notwithstanding their great abilities, often been betrayed into strange and serious errors. But, surely, this ought not to justify the use which the *deriders*, who copied those blunders, made of them. It is but a poor plea for a man who throws dirt at another's face, to say, that he found the ma-

materials ready at hand. Besides, the merciless critic, who eagerly seizes his devoted victim, ought at least to make use of his own eyes, and to understand before he condemns.

Such, then, has been the conduct of those illiberal writers; and by such methods have they endeavoured, and succeeded in throwing an odium on the interesting works of the wise men of Israel, and particularly on the Talmud.

And now, methinks, I hear one of its numerous traducers exclaim—What, sir! are you in earnest? Do you mean to affirm, that there are no absurdities in the Talmud?—no inconsistencies?—no contradictions?—

Have not its authors imposed a heavy yoke upon the people by their traditions, or the oral law, as they call it; pretending that it was derived from Moses, and delivered to him on Mount Sinai? Do not many of those laws militate against humanity? Have not those men preferred their own works to the Bible? Have they not perverted the sacred text, by drawing from it inferences and conclusions wholly unwarranted? Besides, do you not know that these Sages, as you choose

to call them, believed in witchcraft, demons, devils, and I do not know what? Of the many proofs which might be brought in corroboration of this last assertion, let the following suffice:—

“ I walked once”, says Rabbi Chananya,
 “ in *Zippora*, near the place where the gates
 shut, and I saw an enchanter who took up a
 stone, threw it into the air, and it changed
 into a calf! I went and told it to my Fa-
 ther, but he said unto me, Hadst thou eaten
 thereof, then thou mightest have believed
 it; but since it is certain thou didst not eat
 thereof, so be assured that it was, *through*
the power of the devil, only a semblance be-
 fore thine eyes.”

“ The Devils have four mothers, whose
 respective names are, *Lileth*, *Naama*, *Ige-
 reth* and *Machaleth*. Every one of which
 has her host or band of innumerable unclean
 spirits. It is related that each rules one of
 the four seasons of the year; and that they
 assemble on the mount *Nishpah*; and that
 each, together with her numerous progeny,
 domineers from the setting of the sun till
 midnight. Over all these Solomon had

Tale

Demon

4. page 75

power, and they were called his servants, because he used them according to his will and pleasure," &c.—Such are the extravagant tales of your Rabbis—such their wild and whimsical notions ;—and do you wonder that we laugh at them ?

To this powerful appeal, I answer, that so far am I from maintaining that the Talmud is a faultless work, that I am ready to admit that it contains many things which every enlightened, nay every pious Jew, must sincerely wish had either never appeared there, or should at least long ago have been expunged from its pages.

How those objectionable passages came at all to be inserted, can only be accounted for, from that great reverence with which the Israelites of those days used to regard their wise men ; and which made them look upon every word and expression that dropped from the mouth of their Instructors as so many precious sayings, well worthy of being preserved. These they wrote down for their own private information, together with more important matters. And when, in after-times, those writings were collected, in order to be

embodied in one entire work, the collectors, either from want of proper discrimination, or from some pious motive, suffered them to remain ; and thus they were handed down to posterity. That the wiser portion of the nation never approved of them is well known. Nay, that some of the Talmudists themselves regarded them with no very favourable eye, is plain, from the bitter terms in which they exclaimed against them. *

* “ That אגדה *Agadetha*,” (i.e. the sayings) says Rabbi Joshua son of Levi, “ he that writes it down, will have no portion in the next world ; he that explains it, gets scorched ; and he that listens to it, will receive no reward.” — (Talmud Jerusalem.)

Some of those *sayings* are objectionable *per se* ; others are indeed susceptible of explanations, but, without them, are calculated to produce false and erroneous impressions.

Of the former description are all those extravagancies relating to the extent of Paradise, the dimensions of Gehinom, the size of Leviathan, and the *Shor Habar*, the freaks of *Ashmadai*, &c. &c. — idle tales, borrowed most probably from the Parthians and Arabians, to whom the Jews were subject before the promulgation of the Talmud. These absurdities are as foreign to genuine religion, as they are repugnant to common sense. Of the second sort we have already given some examples.

Another fertile source of misconception originated in that natural fondness for the marvellous — so common to undisciplined minds — of which the Ancient Rabbis sometimes availed themselves with the sole view of exciting the attention of their respective audiences. A particular instance of the kind, we have in *Medrash Shir Hashirim* : — Whilst *Rabbi* (Rabbi Jehudah the holy) was delivering a sermon to a large congregation, he observed that the people were

Story

I admit also that there are many and various contradictions in the Talmud. And, in-

Story

- // rather drowsy or inclined to fall asleep. Wishing to rouse them, he exclaimed,—“*There was a woman in Egypt who brought forth six hundred thousand children at one birth.*”
 // An assertion so extraordinary was enough to rouse the most lethargic. The people stared, and looked amazed. One
 // of the Rabbi’s disciples asked him for an explanation; when
 // the Rabbi replied, that he merely alluded to *Jochebed*, who brought forth a son (Moses) whose personal worth, and
 // whose influence, as the chosen messenger of God, was equal
 // to that of six hundred thousand other individuals.

Now let us suppose that the pious Preacher had omitted the explanation, or that the collector of the Rabbi’s opinions had noted his words without the interpretation, and that the assertion had thus found an entrance into the Talmud. What would have followed? Assuredly, this:—That the *devotees* of the dark ages would have taken it as matter of fact, would have firmly believed it; and that for the best of all reasons, because, how else could so holy a man as Rabbi Jehudah have asserted it?—Common sense might, indeed, urge the improbability of the event, but her feeble voice might easily have been silenced, by considering the assumed fact as a Miracle! And if one of those devotees had happened to be a *Rabbi*, a compiler of the Traditional Law, he would as assuredly have inserted it in the long list of equally well-grounded religious tenets: and consequently, every poor ignorant Israelite would have considered it as an article of faith, and would have firmly believed that there was a woman in Egypt who had six hundred thousand children at a birth! Who would have dared to deny it? Who would have had the courage to question it? And the half-enlightened man would, in spite of authority, consider it as a silly fable, and not only despise it, but despise the very books into which such an absurdity could have found insertion. Thus we see how a simple unexplained assertion would alternately give rise to the most gross superstition, and the most unmerited scorn; and finally cover religion with dis-

deed, it would be a miracle were there none. For let it be recollected that this work contains, not the opinions of only a few individuals living in the same society, under precisely similar circumstances, but of hundreds, nay, I might without exaggeration say, of thousands of learned men, of various talents, living in a long series of ages, in different countries, and under the most diversified conditions. And how, in the name of truth, can perfect agreement be expected under such circumstances? Now the only inference which a judicious critic would draw from such a diversity of opinions is this: — that however unanimous those wise men were in every thing that regarded the essential parts of religion, yet on every thing of minor importance, and particularly on philosophical and speculative subjects, they left the mind unfettered: and that they did not, like some of their successors, consider it

grace, and the words of the wise with ridicule. Truly judicious, therefore, was the advice of one of our ancient sages — “Ye wise men, be careful of your words, lest ye be doomed to captivity, and be banished to a place of infected waters, which succeeding disciples may drink and perish, and the name of God will be profaned.”

a crime to differ either from their cotemporaries; or even from their predecessors. At all events, this diversity of opinion ought not to be brought forward as matter of accusation.

*Pratiques
religieuses*

It is said that the Talmudists imposed a heavy burden upon the people by the traditional Law, as if they had been the inventors of those laws. This is, however, not the fact. That there were customs and laws, not expressly mentioned in the Pentateuch, in use long before either the Talmud or its authors were in existence, is evident from the prophetical and historical books of Scripture, as well as from Josephus and the Apocryphal Books.

Thus several of the traditional laws respecting the Sabbath, we find distinctly mentioned in Jeremiah *, and in Nehemiah. †

The four principal fasts, in Zechariah. ‡

The abstaining from several sorts of meats prepared by Heathens, is noticed in Daniel §; also the three daily periods of prayer. ||

* Jerem. xvii. 21, 22. † Nehem. xiii. ‡ Zech. viii. 19.
§ Dan. iv. 10. || Dan. i. 8.

The custom of saying grace before meals is alluded to in Samuel * : also in Josephus. †

The prohibitory law against the use of oil prepared by Heathens, (annulled in after-times) existed already at the time of the Macedonian conquest. ‡. Many others might be specified were it necessary. Now since these customs and ordinances are not described as then, or as recently constituted, they must have been derived from times still more remote, and known only from tradition. How then can it, with any justice, be said

* Samuel ix. 13.

† The Egyptian Priests and officers whose business it was to attend during the King's meals were excused from their usual duty; and the king (Ptolemy Philadelphus) called on the Jewish Priest to say *grace*. He rose, and returning thanks to the Lord for the nourishment they *were about* to receive; concluding the solemnity with a fervent appeal to Heaven on behalf of the king and people. Antiq. b. xii.

‡ On account of their courage and fidelity, and their skill in the art of war, the kings of Asia behaved with great liberality towards the Jews. *Seleucus* surnamed *Nicanor*, admitted them to the privileges and immunities of freemen not only of the Metropolis of *Antioch*, but also of the several cities throughout Asia and lower Syria. The Jews being *prohibited the use of foreign oil*, the Olympic Officers had in commission from the Government to allow them in lieu thereof money. Josephus Antiq. b. xii. — War, b. ii.

that the Talmudists imposed them upon the people?

Nor is it true that they ascribed all the traditionary laws to Moses. They have on the contrary distinctly said, that many of those ordinances and regulations were made at subsequent periods. It was only such explanations and explications as were derived from times immemorial, and concerning which there was not a dissenting voice, which they described as originating from the Legislator. And indeed whoever peruses the Mosaical Code with due attention, will soon be convinced that there must originally have been some such explications. For these laws were not only intended for the moral regulation of individual conduct, but for the government of the multifarious transactions of a whole nation. Now, all laws are in their nature general precepts, and cannot otherwise be expressed than in general terms. The legislator cannot possibly state the variety of cases to which they may be applied, nor can he define every term he may have occasion to use: since this could only be done by words, which might in their turn want

definition, and so he might go on *ad infinitum*. All, therefore, he can do, is to give general rules, leaving their application and explanation to proper opportunities, or to the sound judgment of those who are the natural guardians of the laws. Thus, when the law enjoins the seventh day to be observed as a day of rest, it does not say—Thou shalt not build, nor sow, nor reap, &c. on that day, but—“On it thou shalt do no manner of work.” But since the law does not specify what acts are to be considered as *work*, a question might naturally arise—Is writing, playing on musical instruments, and many other acts of the like nature, included in the word *work*, or not?

Again, when the law says, in case of injury, thou shalt give “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, &c.” is this to be taken in the literal sense, as the Caraites will have it? or in the sense of pecuniary fine, as the Talmudists, with more propriety, interpret it?—If we adopt the former, then what is to be done in case a one-eyed man destroys the eye of a two-eyed man? or a two-eyed man destroys the sight of a one-eyed man? or, which is still more

*sur l'obser-
vance du
Sabbath*

difficult to be determined—suppose the aggressor is blind?—If we adopt the latter meaning, then how, and in what manner is the damage to be estimated?

Again, when the law says—“And thou shalt bind them for a *sign* upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes” (Deut. vi. 8.) is it not natural to enquire, what is meant by the word *sign*? what by *frontlets*? To suppose then that the Legislator, who for forty years constantly resided amongst the people, should have left such ordinances and precepts, as were designed for immediate practice, unexplained, is surely as unreasonable as to suppose him to have stated every possible case to which laws more general in their nature might be applied.

And admitting this, where is the great improbability of their being further transmitted to future generations; particularly when it is considered that a whole tribe was set apart to guard the law, and to teach it to the people; and that most of those laws were intervoven with the common occupations of life; perhaps for the very purpose of their being preserved. Be this as it may,

certain it is, that the greater part of the nation strictly adhered to the Mosaic law, and were chiefly governed by it, from the time of Ezra till the destruction of Jerusalem.

Now in what manner was the written law understood in those times? How was it administered? How applied to the numerous cases which must have occurred during the existence of the Jewish state? What was the practice with regard to marriages, divorces, inheritances, &c., all which are but briefly noticed in the written law?—In what manner were the numerous judicial points, not expressly mentioned in the Pentateuch, decided? In short, what was then considered as the most approved practice? All this information can only be collected from the MISHNAH*—a work, the very style and arrangements of which shew it to be the production of a great mind. Its author, Rabbi Jehudah the holy, who lived during the reigns of *Antoninus Pius* and *Marcus Aurelius*, collected all the traditionary laws, and for the first time embodied them in that celebrated work.

Mischnâh

* Plural Mish-na-yoth, i. e. Repetitions: or secondary laws.

That it was not his intention to impose either on his own or future generations, is evident, first, from his having stated on all controverted subjects, the very names of those who either assented or dissented, though the majority was against them ; for the purpose (as is expressed in the Mishnah *) “ that if at any future period any competent tribunal should prefer the opinion of such a single person to that of a former majority, it might be at liberty to do so.” Secondly, from his having inserted in the collection such laws, &c. as could not at all be practised in his time: I mean all such as related to sacrifices and the temple worship.

Nor was it without great reluctance that he undertook that important work. He and his coadjutors knew very well that they were, by so doing, making a breach on the law ; and they regarded it as such. Because, until that time, it was considered as an inviolable rule “ that things delivered by word of mouth must not be committed to writing.” Besides, the divine Legislator, foreseeing per-

* Edeyoth.

haps the evils that would arise from a multiplicity of laws, had expressly enjoined. "Ye shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord which I command you." (Deut. iv. 2.) The law was to be read by all, taught and explained by those who were the most competent, administered by the best and the wisest of the nation, and every contested point was to be decided by the highest tribunal of the realm. But even such decisions were not to be written down, so as to be invested with authority; perhaps with the very view that they might not be drawn into precedents: because though principles must ever remain the same, yet circumstances may change. The committing, therefore, of the traditional laws into writing, and clothing them with authority, was justly considered as a breach of the written law. But the pious Patriarch of Israel found himself under most embarrassing circumstances, and had only a choice of evils. The nation was just recovering from the dreadful persecution they had experienced under Hadrian, during

which their academies were destroyed, the disciples dispersed, and the most learned men were cut off. Religion sunk lower and lower, and was in danger of being lost: and Rabbi *Jehudah* knew too well the temper of the times, and the character of Israel's oppressors, to suppose that the tranquillity which the remnant of the nation was then permitted to enjoy, would either be permanent, or lasting. Thus situated, on the one hand fearing that a knowledge of the law would be entirely lost; and on the other, the trespass of one of its injunctions, he chose the last as the lesser evil: inasmuch as the loss of a single limb is preferable to the destruction of the whole body.

The breach being thus made, it was soon extended. Some of the learned Rabbi's disciples and successors soon produced other works, either by way of explanations, or additions. Still the Mishnah was considered as the standard and principal source of the traditional law, and soon became a favourite object of study. Being composed in the Hebrew, (which even at that time had become a learned language,) intermixed with

*Suite de la
Mishnah*

several foreign words, and its style being extremely concise, it required learning or instruction to understand it. The learned of that and succeeding ages made it a chief object of their employment to teach it publicly. They explained its difficult terms, elucidated whatever appeared obscure; and stated the principles on which its decisions were founded, and the grounds on which the many opposite opinions mentioned therein rested.

These explanations, &c. together with the determinations of numerous new cases that occurred from time to time, as well as many ordinances and regulations which were made for the government of respective communities, were noted down by private individuals, and in succeeding ages collected * together; and this gave birth to the two works known by the names of the *Jerusalem* † and the *Babylonian Talmud*. ‡

* This collection is denominated *Gemara*, i.e. the finishing, conclusion, or result.

† Rabbi Jo-cho-nan, who lived about the middle of the third century, is considered as the compiler of this work.

‡ The *Babylonian Talmud* is supposed to have been finished by Rabbi Asci and some of his immediate successors,

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These books contain, independent of many philosophical opinions, moral maxims and tales, the whole of the traditional laws; and which consist—First, of such explanations of the written law, and the practice founded upon them, as were derived from immemorial traditions, respecting which there never was a doubt, and which were believed to have been originally imparted by the Divine Legislator. These laws, from their very nature, must rest on the faith and credit attached to the pious men who handed them to posterity.

Secondly, of such as are founded on the written law, and deduced from it by just inferences, analogy, and various other modes of reasoning. These rest on totally different grounds. As deductions made by the rational faculties of the mind, their justness must depend on the correctness of the conclusions, and on the fairness of the arguments by which they are supported.

about the beginning of the sixth century. There are however strong reasons to believe that both works have received several additions at subsequent periods.

The Talmud includes the *Mishnah* and the *Gemara*: the former may be considered as the *text*, the latter as its *comment*.

Thirdly, of such ordinances and regulations as were made by pious and wise men in their respective generations, by way of *preventives*, or hedges to the law, *i. e.* to keep the people from idolatry, or from other sins; and handed down together with the rest of the traditions. Their propriety must depend on the circumstances of the times in which they were enacted; and their genuineness on the same ground as those specified in the first class.

How far it was in the power of any man, or set of men, however learned, and wise, and pious, to bind posterity in matters of conscience?—how far it was even their intention that those ordinances and regulations should permanently remain an integral part of religion under circumstances totally different from those under which they were first enacted?—and whether those pious men, were they now alive, would not see the necessity of abolishing some of them, particularly when those ordinances, instead of proving preservatives to the law, tend to injure it?—are questions which, if they do not suggest their own solutions, would require an answer in-

*Description
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compatible with the limits and specific object of this disquisition.

The preceding observations fully shew that the design of the original collectors of the traditions was laudable. They could not foresee the abuses to which their works gave rise in succeeding ages, nor can they reasonably be made accountable for them. At all events, they ought not to be treated with that asperity which many writers allow themselves—little aware, we will in charity hope, how large a share of those abuses must be attributed to the remorseless persecutions of their own party, with the privations and *denials* of common advantages afforded by the social state, and all *motives* to intellectual exertions, under which the sons of Abraham had to labour.

But it is said that many of those laws militate against humanity. I admit that the Talmud contains several passages, directed against idolatrous heathens, that cannot be reconciled to the dictates of impassionate judgment, or indeed be palliated by a humane man as general principles, or in ignorance of the provocations in which they originated. And these passages are the more remarkable,

since they are in evident contradiction to that universal charity, and good will towards mankind which is so strongly recommended in the Talmud. But before we pass the sentence of condemnation against the authors of that work, let us reflect who the men were against whom those severe laws were directed. Let us not forget that they were the implacable enemies of the Hebrews—that they polluted the holy sanctuary—desolated the country—slaughtered its inhabitants, and covered the land with mourning. Let the reader, of whatever persuasion he may be, read the books of the Maccabees—then let him for a moment suppose himself to be one of those unfortunate Israelites, who were made to drink the bitter cup of affliction to its very dregs. Let him imagine that he saw his country laid waste—that he beheld with his own eyes a venerable father weltering in blood—a beloved mother, or a favourite sister suspended on a tree, with innocent babes hanging round their necks—and all this for no crime, but only for steadily adhering to the institutions of their forefathers—and let him lay his hand on his

*accusations
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le talmud*

heart and say—conscientiously say, what he would think of those Heathens, those savage monsters, who with fiend-like ferocity fell upon a peaceable and unoffending people : then let him determine the degree of asperity with which he can blame the ancient Rulers of Israel for enacting a few severe laws against their unrelenting enemies ; and that perhaps at the very moment when their wounds were still bleeding.

But whatever may be thought of those laws, let it not be forgotten that they are fully counterbalanced by others of a more beneficent character. “It is our duty,” says the Talmud, “to maintain the Heathen poor, with those of our own nation.”—“We must visit their sick and administer to their relief, bury their dead,” &c. *—“The Heathens that dwell out of the land of Israel ought not to be considered as Idolaters; as they only follow the customs of their Fathers.”—“The pious men of the Heathens,” says Rabbi Joshua, “will have their portions in the next world.” †—“These charitable sentiments and numerous others of similar tendency ‡,

* Treatise Gitin.

† Sanhedrin.

‡ “What the wise men have said in this respect (alluding

have been overlooked, whilst a few inimical passages have been selected and exhibited in a strong and false light. So true it is that—

“Men’s evil manners live in brass; their virtues
We write in water.”

The Talmudists are accused of esteeming their own works more than the Bible, and of recommending the Mishnah and Talmud in

*accusation
contre
le Talmud*

to those inimical laws), says Rabbi Mosha, was directed against the ancient Idolaters, who neither believed in a creation, nor the deliverance from Egypt, &c.: but the nations amongst whom we live, whose protection we enjoy, must not be considered in this light; since they believe in a creation, the divine origin of the law, and many other fundamental doctrines of religion. It is therefore not only our duty to shelter them against actual danger, but to pray for their welfare and the prosperity of their respective Governments.” (Beer Hagoleh Choshen Hamishpat, No. 425.)

It is unlawful to deceive or overreach any one, not even a Heathen. (T. Cholin.)

Be circumspect in the fear of the Lord, soft in speech, slow in wrath, kind and friendly to all, even to the Heathens. (T. Berachoth.)

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” Act so that the name of the Lord may become beloved and glorified through thee, &c. (T. Joma.)

And O! that the spiritual guides of the Jewish nation, placed as they are in the seat of honour and authority, would, instead of amusing their respective audiences with the dictum of unimportant traditional ordinances, and lifeless, spiritless ceremonies, impress on their minds these pious and charitable precepts, and lead them back to the study of their holy inspired writings; then, indeed, might the name of the Lord become beloved and glorified, and Israel might once more become “a holy people.”

preference to it. Their traducers endeavour to support this truly absurd charge, by two passages from the Talmud. One (according to their representation) runs thus:—“They who study the Bible, do what is deemed neither virtue nor vice. They who study the *Mishnah*, perform something of a virtue, and on that account receive a reward. But they who study the *Gemara* perform what may be esteemed the greatest virtue.” (Talmud Baba Mezhiah.) The other runs thus:—“The Bible is like water, the Mishnah like wine, and the Talmud like spiced wine,” &c. &c. (Treatise Sophrim.)

From these passages it is inferred that the Talmudists preferred their own works to the Scriptures. But really, I cannot see how such an inference can fairly be drawn from them. For what regards the first quotation, the first part thereof is evidently mistranslated. The original doth not say,—“that those who study the Bible do what is deemed *neither virtue nor vice*,” but “העוסקים במקרא מדה ואינו מדה” “Those who study the Scripture do what is deemed a *virtue and no virtue*,” that is to say, the knowledge of Scripture is so indispensably

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necessary to every Israelite, that those who are engaged in its study, have no right to arrogate any particular merit to themselves, since they are only doing their duty. “Those who study the Mishnah, (not indeed to the exclusion of Scripture, as those writers, would have us believe, but in addition to it,) do what is meritorious, for which they may expect a reward.” Because a knowledge of it is not absolutely necessary for every individual, but for those who are designed to instruct their brethren: because also, it cannot be acquired without great industry and application. And a knowledge of the Talmud, in addition to the preceding, is still more laudable, for the same reasons. The second quotation inculcates the same sentiments. The holy writings are compared to water:—water being indispensably necessary for the preservation of every individual; so are the Scriptures. The Mishnah is compared to wine, —wine being very acceptable, but surely not absolutely necessary. Still less necessary is spiced wine, to which the Talmud is compared: though happy is he who possesses all three in abundance. That these were the real sentiments of the Talmud-

ists, is evident from what they have asserted in words which can bear no misconstruction. "At five years of age, says the *Mishnah*, let the child begin to study the Scriptures; let him continue so to do till the age of ten, when he may begin to study the *Mishnah*; at the age of fifteen let him begin the *Gemara*." *

It is true that this judicious system of instruction was entirely perverted in succeeding ages, particularly in the last five centuries; and that especially in those countries where the unfortunate sons of Israel were most despised and most oppressed. Instead of confining the first five years of the time allotted for education, to the study of Scripture, and deferring the study of the *Gemara* or *Talmud* to the age of fifteen, it was thought proper to abridge the first period, and to extend and anticipate the second. The Bible was not indeed entirely excluded; but it was taught in so unedifying a manner, that the instructed derived but few of those many and great benefits which it is so well calculated to impart. Grammar, history, and many other useful branches of learning were not only neglected, but despised: and

* T. Aboth, Chap. v.

children at the tender age of seven or eight had no sooner passed through the Pentateuch, or some of its parts only, when they were put to the difficult study of the Talmud ; and this, without reference either to their capacities or future prospects. In this pursuit they consumed their valuable days, and even nights. In short, it would appear as if the injudicious guides of Israel's unhappy children, intended to transform the whole nation into Rabbis :—Rabbis, not like those of ancient days, or even like some of more modern date, such as Aben-Ezra, Maimonides, Abarbanel, &c. &c. — who, in addition to most extensive biblical and rabbinical knowledge, were well versed in the sciences, and in all the learning of the respective ages in which they lived — but like those of an inferior cast, whose chief and often only merit consists in the knowledge of the Talmud and its appendages. These good men never reflected that an entire nation of Rabbis would be just as useful, as an entire nation of shoemakers or lawyers.

That in those gloomy times a knowledge of the Talmud was considered, if not more,

at least equally necessary as that of the Bible, and that longer time was spent and more pains bestowed on the former than on the latter *, are facts as lamentable as they are true. Equally true, and no less lamentable, is it, that there are still many fanatics amongst Israel who entertain similar notions ; and who would, most willingly, replunge their brethren into the gulf of superstition and ignorance, into which accumulated misery, oppression, seclusion, and misrule

* Aware of the evils resulting from a system so absurd, the celebrated *Mendelsshon*, and his learned friend *Hartog Wesely* (author of the *Mosaid*, &c. &c.), employed their great talents to counteract and remedy them. To effect this, and to wean his brethren from the corrupt jargon they had adopted in the days of tribulation, the former published his excellent German translation of the Pentateuch and Psalms ; and the latter wrote several Tracts, in which he condemned the modes of instruction then in vogue, and recommended a more judicious system. Many were the obstacles with which these eminent men had to contend. The nation was not sufficiently enlightened to appreciate the transcendent merit of their benefactors. The bigots of those days were all up in arms against these two great Instructors of Israel, and repaid their important services by considering and *treating* them as heretics ! Nevertheless, truth gradually made its way, and triumphed at last. It is to the labours of these two pious Philosophers, aided by the laudable exertion of several learned Jews and noble-minded Christians, that the Israelites of Germany and Holland owe, in a great measure, the rapid advancement in literature, arts, and sciences, by which they begin to distinguish themselves.

had thrown them, and from which the people in general are happily fast emerging. These misguided men still consider the absurd mode of education before described, as the best of all systems ; strongly recommend its re-adoption, and look with an evil eye upon all those instructors of youth who have sense enough to deviate from it. All this is, alas ! but too true. But these faults cannot, with any degree of justice, be ascribed to the Talmudist. They, as we have before shewn, recommended the Scriptures as the primary object and as the basis of all studies : and the whole tenor of their writings proves that they held the Sacred Records in the highest possible veneration.

Indeed, strange as it may appear, it is nevertheless highly probable that this very *reverence* gave rise to that fondness of anatomizing the sacred text, with a view of discovering its hidden meaning, by which they were often betrayed into those fanciful interpretations, and whimsical conjectures, with which they have, not unjustly, been charged.

These ancient interpreters of the Bible were persuaded, and firmly believed, that it

contained, besides the plain and obvious meaning, mysterious and concealed truths : they thought that in a book so holy, and coming from the Fountain of all wisdom, there cannot possibly be either a redundant word, or even a superfluous letter, or a grammatical anomaly ; and consequently, whenever such do appear, they must have been designedly introduced with a view of indicating some unknown truth. Further, as a book of instruction, evidently intended not only to correct the heart, but to enlighten the mind, they supposed it to contain every thing that can be included in the term *knowledge* ; and hence they endeavoured to engraft their philosophical opinions on the text. Further still, they were firmly persuaded that the inspired writers must have had a reason for the choice of particular words, their position in sentences, and even for the consecution of chapters between which there is apparently no connexion. All this they endeavoured to discover ; and they succeeded, or failed, according to the measure of their respective capacities ; or according to the nature of the truths of which they were in search. Now though it must be confessed, as has already

been observed, that in this pursuit, they often exceeded the bounds of just criticism, yet it cannot be denied that many of their inferences and interpretations are highly ingenious, and that most of them have a moral tendency. A few examples will make this clear; and give the general reader an idea of these *Researches* or *Enquiries* as they are called.

1. The holy Law, or Pentateuch, begins with the letter $\beth$ *beth*. Why? Because, says the son of *Kafra*, this letter as a numeral represents the number *two*, and the divine writer wished to indicate that there are two worlds *; one, the material, in which we move and exist, the creation of which he was about to describe—the other, the world of bliss, which we may enjoy hereafter.

2. Because also, says another Rabbi, the figure of this letter $\beth$ represents a space enclosed on three sides, namely the anterior, upper, and lower parts: one side only is left open;—intimating that such a frail creature as *man* must not, dare not, search into what existed antecedent to the creation, nor into what is above or beneath him †:—all this is en-

* Medrash Rabbah. † Talmud Jerusalem. T. Chagigah.

closed and interdicted ; but there is still a wide open space left for his searching mind, namely from the creation onward ; in as far as God has chosen to reveal it in his holy word, or has laid it open to our view in the great and wonderful book of nature.

3. The final letters, (says one of the Talmudists,) of the first three words of the *Law*, בראשית ברא אלהים are ת מ א composing the word אמת *emeth*, (the Hebrew word for *truth*) to indicate that the only object of the holy book is *truth*. This the divine Psalmist has distinctly expressed by saying ראש דברך אמת “The beginning of thy word is TRUTH.”* (Psalm cxix. 160.)

4. They remarked, that the letters composing this word אמת, are taken from the beginning, middle, and end, of the alphabetical series ; because, say they, *truth* ought to be the *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* of all our thoughts and actions, and the object of all our pursuits.

5. They called *Truth* the seal of God †, because he has impressed it on all his works—all of which proclaim his power, intelligence, and goodness.

* Medrash Rabbah.

† T. Shabbath.

6. From the first chapter of Genesis, it would appear, that the heavens and earth were made on distinct days* ; but from the 4th verse of the second chapter, it appears that they were made on the same day. Is this a contradiction? No, said the Hebrew Philosophers †: Heaven and earth, and every thing they contain, were created at once by the Divine will; but their development took place at different periods. To familiarize this transcendant truth to our minds, they compared the divine *fiat* to the act of one who throws a handful of seeds of various kinds into the ground. The act of sowing is instantaneous, and one; but the growth and the development of the plants are successive.

7. Gen. i. 9. יָקוּוּ הַמַּיִם *yekavu hamayim*, “Let the waters be gathered together.” The Hebrew verb corresponding with the English words, “*let them be gathered together*” is יָקוּוּ. As there are many Hebrew words expressive of the same action, such as קָהַל, בָּנַם, אָסַף, אָגַר, why then did the inspired writer choose the term, יָקוּוּ?—Because, says Rabbi *Aba*, he wished to indicate, “that

* See Gen. i. 6—10.

† Medrash Rabbah.

God gave them (*the waters*) a measure * ;” that is to say, the primitive קַב *kav*, from which the verb is derived, signifies a straight or levelling line, and the inspired writer wished to intimate, that the Creator impressed the waters with that peculiar property of always keeping their level ; and he therefore chose a word including the idea of gathering together and making level.

8. In the 20th and 21st of the first chapter of Genesis, it is asserted that the birds were produced from the waters ; yet, in the 19th verse of the second chapter, it is said, that they were produced from the *ground*, or *earth* : how is this to be reconciled ? — “ Because,” says a Rabbi, “ this apparent contradiction is to teach us, that birds were formed from a matter, partaking both of the properties of water, and of earth, namely רֶקֶק, the mud or slime.” † Or rather, that the Almighty had given the feathered race a different organization, suitable to the element in which they were designed to move.

9. “ And the Lord God formed man,” &c. (Gen. ii. 7.) The Hebrew word corresponding with *and he formed*, is יָצַר, written in

* Medrash Rabbah.

† T. Cholin.

every instance where it occurs, with a single י *yod*, but in this verse only it is written, contrary to orthographical rule, with two יי *yods*, thus ייִצֵר. What is the reason? “Because it alludes, says Rabbi Jose, to two formations; one that of *Adam*, the other of *Eve*.” “Because, says Rabbi *Huna*, it alludes to the twofold nature of man, the spiritual and the material.”

10. Gen. ii. 19. “*It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him עֹזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ a help meet for him.*” But the word כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, rendered in the translation “*for him*,” means literally, *as opposed to him*, or *against him*. Now it may naturally be asked, how can that which was intended as a *help*, be against us? *—Answer—The first word alludes to a good and virtuous woman, who, according to the divine intention, is a crown and glory to her husband—a source of life and domestic blessings. But the second word alludes to a bad and wicked woman, who, instead of being a *help meet*, acts in continual opposition to her husband’s will, deprives him of domestic enjoyment, and often proves a curse to him. Be therefore careful,

* T. Jebamoth.—Pirke Rabbi Eliezer.

young man, on whom thou dost fix thy affections; lay not too great a stress on beauty, nor on riches; but let piety and virtue be the chief ornaments of her whom thou choosest as the partner of thy life.

11. Gen. ii. 23. “*She shall be called אִשָּׁה, ISHA, woman, because she was taken out of אִישׁ, ISH, man.*” The latter word is the Hebrew name for *husband*, the former for *wife*. Both words are composed of the letters ו, נ, and the variation consists in the latter having a י, interposed between the נ and ו (thus, אִישׁ), and the former having ה for its final letter. The letters יה form the word YAH, one of the sacred names of God. It is evident, that if we abstract ה from אִשָּׁה, or י from אִישׁ, there remain only the letters ונ, which, as a word (*esh*), signifies *fire*. From these circumstances the Talmudists have drawn the following moral inference:—

Marriage is a divine institution, intended for the most moral and most beneficent of purposes. As long, therefore, as the conjugal alliance is attended by mutual love, mutual fidelity, and a joint endeavour of the two individuals to discharge the sacred obligation of protecting and rearing their

offspring—of educating them on moral and religious principles—setting them the best example by the strictest decency and chastity of manners, and by living in peace and harmony—so long will they merit the distinguishing names of **אִישׁ** (*ish*), *husband*; **אִשָּׁה** (*ishah*), *wife*. The sacred name of God, **יְהוָה** (*Yah*), will remain with them, and his blessings will attend them. But when the union originates in unchaste or impure desires, or in other base motives, it will soon be disturbed by strife and contention: the parental duties will be neglected; God will withdraw his sacred name, and there will remain nothing but **אֵשׁ**, *esh*, **אֵשׁ**, *esh*, *fire, fire**;—or two unhallowed flames, which will soon consume and destroy the unworthy pair.

12. Gen. iv. 7. “*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*” The Hebrew word **חַטָּאת**, corresponding with the English word *sin*, is feminine, and ought, according to grammatical construction, to have the corresponding verb in the same gender; thus **רַבְּצָה**: but in the sacred text the verb is in the masculine, **רָבַץ**. How shall we account

* Talmud. T. Sota. Pirke Rabbi Eleizer. Medrash Rabba.

for this grammatical anomaly? Did the inspired writer not know the grammatical construction of his own language? This idea is too absurd to be entertained even for a moment. But the sacred penman intended, by this very anomaly, to intimate a most important truth; namely, that the human heart is not essentially vicious. On the contrary, it requires time and repeated attacks to corrupt it; and that “Sin, in making its first approaches, appears as unassuming, as modest, and as fascinating, as a weak and innocent *female*; but admit it once over the threshold of your door, and it will soon be found as vigorous, as daring, and as presumptuous as a *male*.”*

On this was the saying of Rabbi *Akiba* founded, “That the יצר הרע, *the evil thought*, or the incitement to sin, appears at first as the unsubstantial threads of a spider’s web; but is soon found as strong as a ship’s cable.”†

To this also the Prophet *Isaiah* alluded when he said, “Woe be unto them who draw iniquity upon themselves with almost imper-

* Medrash Bereshith Rabbah.

† Ibid.

ceptible cords, and soon find their sins as thick as the ropes of a waggon."

13. "*And thou shalt grope at noon-day.* בְּאֶפְלָה יִמָּשֵׁשׁ הָעֵוֶר, *as the blind gropes in the dark.*" (Deut. xxviii. 29.) The word בְּאֶפְלָה, *in the darkness*, appears redundant. This Rabbi Jose remarked, and said (to use his own words)—"All my days did I feel pain at not being able to explain this verse. For what difference can it be to the blind man, whether he walketh in the light, or in the dark?" And yet the sacred penman would not have put down a word unnecessarily. What then does it mean? This the Rabbi did not know—and it gave him pain—"Till one night," continues the sage, "as I was walking in the road, I met a blind man with a lighted torch in his hand. Son, said I, why dost thou carry that torch? Thou canst not see its light!" "Friend, replied the unfortunate man, true it is, I cannot see it, but others can;—as long as I carry this lighted torch in my hand, the sons of men see me, take compassion of me, apprize me of danger, and save me from pitfalls, from thorns and briars."* The Rabbi

* T. Megilah.

was then satisfied that the apparently superfluous word was meant to depict the greatness of the calamities that were to befall the Jewish nation. Its unfortunate members were not only to grope about like the blind—but like the blind in the darkness!—Without a ray of light to exhibit their distress, and without a pitying eye to take compassion of them!

And O, thou unfortunate daughter of Judah! How truly, alas! has this malediction, denounced against thee above three thousand years ago, been verified during thy eighteen hundred years of sad pilgrimage! How truly is it still verifying in many countries! The light of knowledge shines with resplendent lustre, but it shines not for thee!—Loud, and sweetly too, does humanity plead the cause of wretchedness; but it pleads not for thee. The benign eye of Benevolence darts its vivifying looks every where, but it regards not thee. Thou alone—thou once great amongst nations—thou art still derided, despised, and neglected! For thee eloquence is dumb—compassion deaf—and pity blind. But despair not, Israel! The same awful voice that denounced the malediction, did

also promise thee happier days. It rests with thee—with thee alone. שׁוּבִי אֵלַי, “Return unto me, and I will return unto you, says the Lord of Hosts.” (Mal. iii.)

14. But to proceed :—“ Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God *who gave it.*” (Eccles. xii. 7.) The words, *who gave it*, appear redundant. For know we not that it is God who gave us the soul? But, say the wise men, these words teach us to remember that God gave us the soul in a state of innocence and purity; and that it is therefore our duty to return her unto him in the same state as he gave her unto us—pure and undefiled. And they illustrated this by the following parable :—“ A certain king distributed amongst his servants various costly garments : Now some of those servants were wise, and some were foolish. And those that were wise said to themselves, the king may call again for the garments; let us, therefore, take care they do not get soiled. But the fools took no manner of care of theirs, and did all sorts of work in them, so that they became full of spots and grease. Some time afterwards, the

Fable

// king called for the garments. The wise ser-
 // vants brought theirs clean and neat ; but the
 // foolish servants brought theirs in a sad state,
 // ragged and unclean. The king was pleased
 // with the first, but angry with the last. And
 // he said, Let the clean garments be placed in
 // the treasury, and let their keepers depart in
 // peace. As for the unclean garments, they
 // must be washed and purified, and their foolish
 // keepers must be cast in prison."

.. Thus, concerning the bodies of the righte-
 ous, it is said—"He shall enter into peace ;
 they shall rest on their beds," (Isa. lvii. 21.)
 And of their souls it is said—"And the soul
 of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of life
with the Lord thy God." (1 Sam. xxviii. 29.)
 But concerning the bodies of the wicked it is
 said—"There is no peace, says God, to the
 wicked." (Isa. lvii. 21.) And of their souls it
 is said—"And the soul of thine enemies,
 them shall he sling out, as out of the middle
 of a sling."*

In a similar manner did Rabbi Jochonan
 explain the following verse : "Let thy gar-
 ments be always white, and let the oil of thy
 head never lack." (Eccles. ix. 8.) The mean-

* T. Shabbath.

ing of which is — Keep thy soul always in a state of purity, like a white spotless garment, and anoint her with the oil of righteousness: for thou knowest not the day when she may be called before her heavenly Father. And he added the following parable by way of illustration:—“A certain king once invited all his servants to a feast, but did not specify the precise time. And some of these servants were wise, and some were foolish. Now the wise servants said to themselves, it is true here is no immediate sign of a feast, but nothing can be wanting in the house of a king. The feast may be got ready in a moment, and we may be called. They therefore went and washed, and anointed themselves; and when they had put on their best garments, they waited before the door of the king’s palace. But the foolish servants said, Is there ever a feast without preparation? But here are no cooks, no cloth laid, no tables spread — come let us go about our usual work. It will be time enough to wash and to change our garments when the preparation for the feast begins. And they each went to his usual labour — the whitewasher to his lime, the pot-

Tale.

ter to his clay, and the blacksmith to his coals. All on a sudden the herald proclaimed that the feast was ready, and that the guests must come without a moment's delay. The wise servants appeared before the king clean and neat, but the foolish servants appeared in their common garments, covered with mire and dirt. And the king was rejoiced to see the first, and was angry with the latter. And he said, Ye that have prepared yourselves for the feast, sit down and enjoy it: but ye fools who have neglected my invitation stand off, and look on." *—Now by the king is meant the King of kings, the Almighty—blessed be his name, The wise servants are the good and virtuous: the foolish servants are the wicked and ungodly. By the garments is meant our thoughts and actions; and by the *feast*, future everlasting bliss. To this feast we are all invited—all may enjoy it, provided they appear as they ought. And since the hour of call is uncertain, it behoves us to be *always* prepared; that our soul may appear before our Heavenly King pure and spotless as a white garment, and adorned

* T. Shabbath. Medrash Koheloth.

with the never-fading flowers of truth and righteousness.

Such then is the nature of these *Inquiries* or *Researches*—such their moral tendency. And though it must be admitted that the Talmudical inferences are not all of equal interest with these—(and indeed the Talmudists themselves have attached no such vast importance to them*)—yet it cannot be doubted that the motives of their respective authors were truly laudable. The charge, therefore, of their having drawn unwarrantable inferences from the sacred text is, to say the least of it, greatly exaggerated.

But the Talmudists, it is said, “believed in the existence of demons,” &c. &c. And suppose they did? Less than three centuries ago, who did not? The sagest and most learned of Europe would have reprobated the denial as a presumptuous innovation. And

Demon
v. page 33.

* That the Talmudists have attached no such vast importance to this species of study, is evident from their having made it a general rule “That אין המקרא יוצא מפשוטו, the text does not depart from its simple and obvious meaning.” And from their saying אין סומכין על הדרש, “We must not lean or depend upon mere inference.”

Démocrate
V. page 33.

must they therefore have been fools and idiots?

It is well known that the existence of demons was not only the popular belief, but was entertained by the wisest men of antiquity, Plato himself not excepted. That the Jews should have adopted the same error is not at all to be wondered at. Now, as we neither despise the learning of Aristotle, though, in common with other philosophers, he believed that the heavenly bodies were all animated, living beings;—nor the wisdom of Socrates and Plato, though they believed in the existence of demons, I do not see why the Talmudists alone should be derided and despised for having adopted and asserted similar opinions.

As for the two stories before cited, I think they have been most unfortunately chosen. For what regards the first, about the *Enchanter* and the *Calf*, I do not see how such an inference as the Rabbi's belief in the interference of the devil, can reasonably be deduced from it. This infernal personage is not so much as mentioned in the original.*

* The following is the story as it appears in the original.
 אמר ר' חנינא בן חנניא משייל הוינא באילין גיפתא דצפורין והמית חד

His sable majesty was purposely introduced by the objectors, to give greater effect to their unreasonable charge. All that we can justly infer from the original is this:—That the son of Chananya having observed the wonderful feat of the conjuror, told it to his father; and that the father, like a sensible man, jocosely told him, “hadst thou eaten of that calf, thou mightest have believed it; but since thou didst not, rest assured it was only a semblance before thy eyes”—an optical illusion.

The second story *, however, betrays such gross ignorance in the translators, and the allegory is in itself so beautiful, that I cannot forbear to give its proper interpretation. But before I do this, I think it ne-

מאיניי נסב חדא גילגלא וורקא לרומא והיא נחתא ומחעבד עגל ; אתחית ואמרת לאבא, אמר לי אין אכלת מיניה מעשה היא, ואי לא אחזית עינים.
Talmud Jerusalem, Treatise Sanhedrim. Chap. 7.

Not a word appears here of either the devil or his fraternity. But the deriders of the Talmud, instead of having recourse to the original, made their quotation from a work entitled *Nishmath Chajim*, written by the learned Manassah Ben Israel ; and were misled.

* Even this story is not at all to be found in the Talmud. The Objectors have taken it from Rabbi *Bechaja*'s comment on the Pentateuch ; and, as usual, their hasty zeal to condemn, has deprived them of that judgment which a critic ought to possess.

cessary to premise the following particulars:— That the Rabbis often designate the vices, passions, and evil propensities by the name of *devils*. That the word לילית *Lilith* (from לילה, *Lajela*, night,) denotes *darkness*, *ignorance*:—that נעמה *naamah* (from נועם *noam*), means *pleasure*:—that אגרת *Igereth* (from גור to be in an unsettled state, to wander,) alludes to the wandering of the *fancy* or *imagination*:—that מחלת *machelath* (from חלה to be sick, diseased), denotes *weakness of mind* or *body*:—that נשפה *nishpah* (from נשף), signifies *twilight*. And now let us read over the cited story.

“ The devils (VICES) owe their origin to four mothers (SOURCES); namely to *Lilith* (IGNORANCE), *Naama* (PLEASURE), *Igereth* (the IMAGINATION, or the wanderings of the *fancy*, which seldom present things in a true light), and, lastly, *Machelath*” (WEAKNESS OF BODY OR MIND). They are accompanied by hosts of impure spirits (*desires*). “ They each rule one of the four seasons of the year,” i. e. the four principal periods of life: Thus, *Ignorance* governs *childhood*—*Pleasure* governs *youth*—*Imagination* and the speculative wanderings of the *fancy* go-

vern *manhood*—and *weakness of mind* governs *advanced age*. “They all assemble near the mount *Nishpah* (*twilight*), alluding to those unhappy beings, who, just awakening from the torpor into which superstition had thrown them, and with glimmerings of light, barely sufficient to make their own darkness visible, fain would enter into the arcana of nature, and engage in speculations above their reach. Such unseasonable and inadequate efforts, generally commence in scepticism, and end in infidelity; that great reservoir of vice and sensuality. “They rule from the setting of the sun (i. e. *reason and intellectual light*) till after midnight” (the re-appearance of knowledge). And the allegorist adds, that, formidable as these bands appear, yet *Solomon* (WISDOM), governs them all, and uses them according to his pleasure.” For it is the wise man, and *he* only, that knows how properly to direct and guide those passions and desires, which nature, for the wisest of purposes, has implanted in our breasts.

Now, though it is far from my wish to exalt the learning of the Rabbis, (and indeed they need it not,) yet I may be allowed

Demost

to say, that had this beautiful allegory appeared in the writings of the Heathens, it would have been fondly admired. But because it is found in the works of the Rabbis, it is perverted and distorted, and brought as a proof of their belief in witchcraft and devils. But so it is; for all our boast of being enlightened, we are still governed by names. When Plato says — “that the main object of human pursuits ought to be a resembling God as much as possible; and to resemble God is to imitate his justice, his holiness, and wisdom” * — we justly regard it as a divine truth; but when the Talmud expresses the same sentiments, only in different words †, it is passed over with silent contempt.

When *Esop*, in answer to the question put to him by *Chilo*, What God was doing? said,

* Plato's *Theætetus*: the same sentiment will be found in his *second Alcibiades*, and in his *Laws*.

† It is written in Scripture, says the Talmud, “Ye shall walk after the Lord your God, and cleave unto him.” How is this possible? Is it not said that the Lord is like a consuming fire! But the meaning is, that it is our duty to imitate our Creator as much as possible. He is merciful; so ought we to be. He is holy; so ought we to be. He clothes the naked; so ought we to do. He feeds the hungry; so ought we to feed the hungry, &c.—Treatise Sota. See also Maimonides' *Canones Ethici*.

“ That he was depressing the proud, and exalting the humble,”—the reply is considered as most admirable.* But when a poor Rabbi says the same thing, only differently expressed, then it is treated with ridicule.

Enough, I think, has been said to shew the injustice with which the Talmudists have been treated by many modern writers. But what may be considered as most blameable in them is, that they have totally passed over the moral part of the Talmud ; and those instructive parables and tales, which, independent of the entertainment they offer, are so many miniature paintings of the habits, manners, and modes of thinking, of an ancient people at a remote period of antiquity. That this silence cannot be ascribed to want of matter, the reader will best be able to decide, after he has gone through the accom-

* Bayle, in his Dictionary, admired this answer of Esop, and thought it wonderful. But the same sentiments are to be found in the *Medrash*, though expressed in different words ; and conveyed, as was usual with the Jewish writers of ancient days, in the form of a story. It runs thus :—A matron once asked Rabbi Jose, “ In how many days did God create the world ” ? “ In six days,” replied the Rabbi, as it is written, “ In six days God made the heaven and the earth.” “ But,” continued she, “ what is he doing now ” ? “ O,” replied the Rabbi, “ he makes ladders, on which he causes the poor to ascend and the rich to descend :” or, in other words, he exalts the lowly, and depresses the haughty.

Tale

panying collection. However, as the object of this Essay is not to arraign others, but to defend the uninspired writings against unjust attacks, and to give the reader a general idea of their contents, I most willingly drop this subject.

To conclude : I lament with *Schelling* (in the words of my esteemed Friend), “ that the learned should have turned their backs on the Hebrew sources ; and that, whilst they hope to find the key of ancient doctrine in the obscure, insolvable riddles of Egyptian hieroglyphics ; whilst nothing is heard but the language and wisdom of India ; the writings and traditions of the Rabbins are consigned to neglect, without examination.” * Still more do I lament to observe this general apathy amongst my own brethren. True it is, that the short period generally allotted for the education of Jewish youth—a period hardly sufficient to furnish them with an ample knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures—must exclude the Talmud from forming a branch of early instruction, were it even advisable. But admitting this, I really do not see why persons of riper years, blessed with

* See *The Friend*, by S. T. Coleridge, vol. ii.

competence and talents, should entirely neglect it; unless they choose blindly to follow the dictates of men, and imagine that the essence of religion consists in the mere observance of a few rites and ceremonies.

*possibilité
de
comprendre
le
Talmud*

Nor is this attainment so difficult as is generally supposed. A knowledge of the Hebrew language will enable any person, with the assistance of a commentator, to understand the Talmud. But whoever peruses that ancient work, must bear in mind that it contains the religious and philosophical opinions of thousands of learned and highly-gifted men, who lived during the long extent of nearly a thousand years, in different countries, various situations, and under the most variegated circumstances; and that above a thousand years have elapsed since those opinions were collected. The piety of its authors is unquestionable. Its morality, with the exception of a few isolated opinions, is excellent. To believe that its multifarious contents are all dictates of unerring wisdom, is as extravagant as to suppose that all it contains is founded in error. Like all other productions of unaided humanity, it is not free from mistakes and prejudices, to remind us that

the writers were fallible men, and that unqualified admiration must be reserved for the works of divine inspiration, which we ought to study, the better to adore and obey the all-perfect Author. But while I should be among the first to protest against any confusion of the Talmudic Rills with the ever-flowing Stream of Holy Writ, I do not hesitate to avow my doubts, whether there exists any uninspired work of equal antiquity, that contains more interesting, more various, and valuable information, than that of the still existing remains of the ancient Hebrew Sages.

HEBREW TALES.

HERBERT TALLEY

HERBERT TALLEY

My dear Mr. Tally,
I have just received your letter of the 10th inst. and am glad to hear from you. I am well and hope this finds you the same. I have been thinking of you very much lately and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately but I will try to write you more often. I have been thinking of you very much lately and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately but I will try to write you more often.

HEBREW TALES.

I.

Moses and the Lamb.—A traditional Tale.

“The Lord is good to all, and his mercies are over all his works.”

PSALM clxv.

OUR wise Instructors relate, that whilst Moses was attending Jethro's flock in the wilderness, a lamb strayed from the herd. Moses endeavoured to overtake it, but it ran much faster than he, till it came near a fountain, where it suddenly stopped, and took a draught of water. “Thou little dear innocent creature,” said Moses, “I see now why thou didst run away. Had I known thy want, on my shoulders would I have carried

thee to the fountain to assuage thy thirst. But come, little innocent, I will make up for my ignorance. Thou art no doubt fatigued after so long a journey, thou shalt walk no further." He immediately took the little creature into his arms, and carried it back to the flock.

The Almighty Father of Mercies—*He* who diffused those precious drops of pity and kindness over the human heart, approved of the deed; and a heavenly voice was heard to exclaim—"Moses! Benevolent Moses! If a dumb animal thus excite thy compassion, how much more will the children of men! What wilt thou not do for thine own brethren! Come, henceforth thou shalt be the Shepherd of my chosen flock, and teach them by thy example—'*that the Lord is good to all, and that his mercies are over all his works.*'"

MEDRASH SHEMOTH RABAH.

II.

The Value of a Good Wife.

He that hath found a virtuous wife, hath a greater treasure
than costly pearls.

SUCH a treasure had the celebrated teacher RABBI MEIR found. He sat during the whole of one Sabbath day in the public school, and instructed the people. During his absence from his house his two sons, both of them of uncommon beauty and enlightened in the law, died. His wife bore them to her bed-chamber, laid them upon the marriage-bed, and spread a white covering over their bodies. Towards evening Rabbi Meir came home. "Where are my beloved sons," he asked, "that I may give them my blessing?" "They are gone to the school," was the answer. "I repeatedly looked round the school," he replied, "and I did not see them there." She reached him a goblet; he praised the Lord at the going out of the Sabbath,

drank, and again asked, "Where are my sons, that they may drink of the cup of blessing?" "They will not be far off," she said, and placed food before him, that he might eat. He was in a gladsome and genial mood, and when he had said grace after the meal, she thus addressed him:—"Rabbi, with thy permission I would fain propose to thee one question." "Ask it, then, my love!" he replied. "A few days ago a person entrusted some jewels to my custody, and now he demands them again: should I give them back again?" "This is a question," said Rabbi Meir, "which my wife should not have thought it necessary to ask. What! wouldst thou hesitate or be reluctant to restore to every one his own?" "No," she replied, "but yet I thought it best not to restore them without acquainting thee therewith." She then led him to their chamber, and, stepping to the bed, took the white covering from their bodies. "Ah, my sons! my sons!" thus loudly lamented the father: "My sons! the light of mine eyes, and the light of my understanding; I was your father, but ye were my teachers in the Law!" The mother turn-

ed away, and wept bitterly. At length she took her husband by the hand, and said, "Rabbi, didst thou not teach me that we must not be reluctant to restore that which was entrusted to our keeping? See, the Lord gave, the Lord has taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord!" "Blessed be the name of the Lord!" echoed Rabbi Meir, "and blessed be his name for thy sake too! for well is it written, 'He that has found a virtuous woman has a greater treasure than costly pearls. She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the instruction of kindness.' " *

* The above and the two following stories are translated by S. T. Coleridge, Esq.

III.

The Lord helpeth Man and Beast.

DURING his march to conquer the world, Alexander, the Macedonian, came to a people in Africa who dwelt in a remote and secluded corner in peaceful huts, and knew neither war nor conqueror. They led him to the hut of their chief, who received him hospitably, and placed before him golden dates, golden figs, and bread of gold. "Do you eat gold in this country?" said Alexander. "I take it for granted (replied the chief) that thou wert able to find eatable food in thine own country. For what reason, then, art thou come amongst us?" "Your gold has not tempted me hither," said Alexander, "but I would become acquainted with your manners and customs." "So be it," rejoined the other: "sojourn among us as long as it pleaseth thee." At the close of this conversation two citizens entered, as into their

court of justice. The plaintiff said, "I bought of this man a piece of land, and as I was making a deep drain through it, I found a treasure. This is not mine, for I only bargained for the land, and not for any treasure that might be concealed beneath it; and yet the former owner of the land will not receive it." The defendant answered, "I hope I have a conscience, as well as my fellow-citizen. I sold him the land with all its contingent, as well as existing advantages, and consequently the treasure inclusively."

The chief, who was at the same time their supreme judge, recapitulated their words, in order that the parties might see whether or not he understood them aright. Then, after some reflection, said, "Thou hast a son, friend, I believe?" "Yes."—"And thou (addressing the other), a daughter? "Yes."—"Well, then, let thy son marry *thy* daughter, and bestow the treasure on the young couple for a marriage portion."

Alexander seemed surprized and perplexed. "Think you my sentence unjust?" the chief asked him. "O, No!" replied Alexander, "but it astonishes me."—"And how,

then," rejoined the chief, " would the case have been decided in your country?" To confess the truth, said Alexander, we should have taken both parties into custody and have seized the treasure for the king's use." " For the kings use!" exclaimed the chief, " Does the sun shine on that country?" " O yes!"—" Does it rain there?" " Assuredly."—" Wonderful! But are there tame animals in the country, that live on the grass and green herbs?" " Very many, and of many kinds."—" Aye, that must then be the cause, said the chief: for the sake of those innocent animals the all-gracious Being continues to let the sun shine and the rain drop down on your own country; since its inhabitants are unworthy of such blessings.

T. TAMID.

BERESHITH RABAH.

VAJEEKRA RABAH.

IV.

Conversation of a Philosopher with a Rabbi.

“YOUR God in his Book calls himself a jealous God, who can endure no other God beside himself, and on all occasions makes manifest his abhorrence of idolatry. How comes it then that he threatens and seems to hate the worshippers of false gods more than the false gods themselves?” — “A certain king,” replied the Rabbi, “had a disobedient son. Among other worthless tricks of various kinds, he had the baseness to give to his dogs his Father’s name and titles. Should the king shew his anger on the prince or the dogs?” — “Well turned,” replied the Philosopher: “but if your God destroyed the objects of idolatry, he would take away the temptation to it.” “Yea, retorted the Rabbi,” if the fools worshipped

such things only as were of no further use than that to which their folly applied them,—if the idols were always as worthless as the idolatry is contemptible. But they worship the sun, the moon, the host of heaven, the rivers, the sea, fire, air, and what not. Would you that the Creator, for the sake of these fools, should ruin his own works, and disturb the laws appointed to nature by his own wisdom? If a man steals grain and sows it, should the seed not shoot up out of the earth, because it was stolen? O, no! the wise Creator lets nature run her own course; for her course is his own appointment. And what if the children of folly abuse it to evil? The day of reckoning is not far off, and men will then learn that human actions likewise re-appear in their consequences by as certain a law as the green blade rises up out of the buried corn-seed.”

TALMUD AVODA ZARA.

V.

*Wine best preserved in homely Vessels, and
Beauty no friend to Wisdom ; or, the
Princess and Rabbi Joshua.*

RABBI JOSHUAH, the son of Cha-nan-yah, was one of those men whose minds are far more beautiful than their bodies. He was so dark that people often took him for a blacksmith, and so plain, as almost to frighten children. Yet his great learning, wit, and wisdom, had procured him not only the love and respect of the people, but even the favour of the Emperor Trajan. Being often at court, one of the Princesses rallied him on his want of beauty. “*How comes it,*” said she, “*that such glorious wisdom is inclosed in so mean a vessel ?*” The Rabbi, no ways dismayed, requested her to tell him in what sort of vessels her father kept his wine. “*Why, in earthen vessels, to be sure,*” replied the Princess. “*O !*” exclaimed the

witty Rabbi, "this is the way that ordinary people do: an Emperor's wine ought to be kept in more precious vessels." The Princess, thinking him in earnest, ordered a quantity of wine to be emptied out of the earthen jars into gold and silver vessels; but, to her great surprise, found it in a very short time sour, and unfit to drink. "Very fine advice, indeed, Joshua, hast thou given me!" said the Princess, the next time she saw him: "Do you know the wine is sour and spoiled?" "Thou art then convinced," said the Rabbi, "that wine keeps best in plain and mean vessels. It is even so with wisdom." "But," continued the Princess, "I know many persons who are both wise and handsome." "True," replied the Sage, "but they would, most probably, be still wiser, were they less handsome."*

T. NEDARIM.

* Intimating that beauty is mostly accompanied by vanity; and vanity, as it is well known, is not very conducive to wisdom.

VI.

Mercy in Judgment.—A Parable of Rabbi Jo-cho-nan.

Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth.

PROV. xxiv.

RABBI JOCHONAN relates, that whilst the Egyptians were drowning in the Red Sea, the angels wished to chaunt the song of praise; but God rebuked them, saying—
“What! the works of my hand are perishing, and ye wish to sing!”

T. SANHEDRIM.

This fully agrees with the character of God, as given in various parts of Scripture; where he is represented as the God of mercy, who wishes not the destruction of the wicked, but their repentance. When, therefore, the wickedness of men calls down just punishment upon their guilty heads, it ought to serve as a warning, but not as matter of joy.

VII.

Hope, Resignation, and Dependence on the Divine Protection recommended, by the consideration, that even Calamities, as far as they are dispensations of God, prove at length to have been Blessings in disguise.—This illustrated in the Life of R. Akiba.

All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenants and his testimonies.

PSALM XXV.

MAN, with his boasted wisdom, is but a short-sighted creature; and, with all his pretended power, a weak and helpless being. *

* The futility of our endeavours without the assistance of God, is beautifully expressed in the 127th Psalm. “Except the *Lord* build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord guard the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

Every man’s own experience may furnish him with examples to verify the truth of this position; but none are more striking than those which are found in Scripture. No doubt, king David, like every other parent, rejoiced at the birth of *Absalom*, that very son who drove his royal sire

He knows not in one moment what will happen to him in the next. Nor could such knowledge, were he to possess it, either prevent or retard events over which he has not the least control. The eminent faculties with which he is gifted may indeed enable him to see the immediate effects of particular occurrences, but the remote consequences and final results, are hidden from his confined view. Hence he often wishes for things, which, were they granted, would tend to his injury; and he as often laments and bewails those very events which ultimately prove to his benefit. Thus circumstanced, he could not possibly escape the numerous dangers that surround him, nay, he would often rush on that very destruction which he seeks to avoid, were it not for the merciful providence of that supreme Being, who gave us our existence, who

from the throne, and embittered the rest of his days.— Jacob deeply lamented and bewailed the absence of *Joseph*, little thinking that, that very absence was the means of saving him and his family from *famine*; and that it was a necessary link in the chain of those astonishing events, the mighty influence of which extends even to our days, and whose final results are still hidden in the womb of time.

watches over our welfare, and who guides our steps.

It is HE who delivers us from “the noxious pestilence which marches, in the dark, and from the destruction which rages at noon.” It is HE that turns our mourning into joy, and who changes present evils into everlasting good. “Happy then the man who has the God of Jacob for his help, and who trusts in the Lord his God.”

So convinced was *Rabbi Akiba* of these divine truths, so fully persuaded was he that from the fountain of goodness no real evil can flow, that even under the greatest afflictions and sufferings—and they were many, and various—he was accustomed to say—“Whatever God does is for our good.” The ancient Sages of Israel have recommended us to adopt the same maxim; and they have illustrated it, by the following narrative.

Compelled by violent persecution to quit his native land, *Rabbi Akiba* wandered over barren wastes and dreary deserts. His whole equipage consisted of a lamp, which

he used to light at night, in order to study the Law ; a cock, which served him instead of a watch, to announce to him the rising dawn ; and an ass, on which he rode.

The sun was gradually sinking beneath the horizon, night was fast approaching, and the poor wanderer knew not where to shelter his head, or where to rest his weary limbs. Fatigued, and almost exhausted, he came at last near a village. He was glad to find it inhabited ; thinking where human beings dwelt, there dwelt also humanity and compassion ; but he was mistaken. He asked for a night's lodging—it was refused. Not one of the inhospitable inhabitants would accommodate him. He was therefore obliged to seek shelter in a neighbouring wood.—“It is hard, very hard,” said he, “not to find a hospitable roof to protect me against the inclemency of the weather ;—*but God is just, and whatever he does is for the best.*” He seated himself beneath a tree, lighted his lamp, and began to read the *law*. He had scarcely read a chapter, when a violent storm extinguished the light. “What,” exclaimed he, “must I not be permitted even to pursue

my favorite study!—*But God is just, and whatever he does is for the best.*”

He stretched himself on the bare earth, willing, if possible, to have a few hours' sleep. He had hardly closed his eyes, when a fierce wolf came and killed the cock. “What new misfortune is this?” ejaculated the astonished Akiba. “My vigilant companion is gone! Who then will henceforth awaken me to the study of the law? But God is just: he knows best what is good for us poor mortals.” Scarcely had he finished the sentence, when a terrible lion came and devoured the ass. “What is to be done now?” exclaimed the lonely wanderer. “My lamp and my cock are gone—my poor ass, too, is gone—all is gone! But, *praised be the Lord, whatever he does is for the best.*” He passed a sleepless night, and early in the morning went to the village, to see whether he could procure a horse, or any other beast of burthen, to enable him to pursue his journey. But what was his surprise, not to find a single individual alive!

It appears that a band of robbers had entered the village during the night, killed its

inhabitants, and plundered their houses. As soon as AKIBA had sufficiently recovered from the amazement into which this wonderful occurrence had thrown him, he lifted up his voice, and exclaimed, "Thou great God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, now I know by experience that poor mortal men are short-sighted and blind ; often considering as evils what is intended for their preservation ! But thou alone art just, and kind, and merciful ! Had not the hard-hearted people driven me, by their inhospitality, from the village, I should assuredly have shared their fate. Had not the wind extinguished my lamp, the robbers would have been drawn to the spot, and have murdered me. I perceive also that it was thy mercy which deprived me of my two companions, that they might not by their noise give notice to the banditti where I was. Praised, then, be thy name, for ever and ever !"

T. BERACHOTH

VIII.

Intended Divorce and Reconciliation.

A wise woman buildeth her house, &c.

PROV. xiv. 1.

A CERTAIN Israelite of Sidon, having been married above ten years without being blessed with offspring, determined to be divorced from his wife. With this view he brought her before Rabbi Simon son of Jo-cho-e. The Rabbi who was unfavourable to divorces, endeavoured at first to dissuade him from it. Seeing him however disinclined to accept his advice, he addressed him and his wife thus:—"My Children, when you were first joined in the holy bands of wedlock, were ye not rejoiced? Did ye not make a feast and entertain your friends? Now, since ye are resolved to be divorced, let your separation be like your union. Go home, make a feast,

entertain your friends, and on the morrow come to me, and I will comply with your wishes. So reasonable a request, and coming from such authority, could not, with any degree of propriety, be rejected. They accordingly went home, prepared a sumptuous entertainment, to which they invited their several friends. During the hours of merriment, the husband being elated with wine, thus addressed his wife:—"My beloved, we have lived together happily these many many years; it is only the want of children that makes me wish for a separation. To convince thee however, that I bear thee no ill-will, I give thee permission to take with thee out of my house, any thing thou likest best." "Be it so," rejoined the woman. The cup went round, the people were merry; and having drank rather freely, most of the guests fell asleep; and amongst them the master of the feast. The Lady no sooner perceived it, than she ordered him to be carried to her father's house, and to be put into a bed prepared for the purpose. The fumes of the wine having gradually evaporated, the man awoke. Finding himself in a strange place,

he wondered and exclaimed, "Where am I? How came I here? What means all this?" His wife who had waited to see the issue of her stratagem, stepped from behind a curtain, and begging him not to be alarmed, told him that he was now in her father's house. "In thy father's house!" exclaimed the still astonished husband, "How should I come in thy father's house?" "Be patient, my dear husband," replied the prudent woman; "be patient, and I will tell thee all. Recollect, didst thou not tell me last night, I might take out of thy house whatever I valued most? Now, believe me, my beloved, amongst all thy treasures there is not one I value so much as I do thee; nay, there is not a treasure in this world I esteem so much as I do thee." The husband, overcome by so much kindness, embraced her, was reconciled to her; and they lived thenceforth very happily together.

MEDRASH SHIR HASHIRIM.

IX.

The Heavenly Lamp.

The soul of man is the candle of the Lord.

PROV. XX.

RABBI TAN-CHUM was once asked, whether it was allowable to extinguish a candle on the sabbath, in case it incommoded a sick person? “What a question you ask!” replied the Rabbi. “True, you call a burning candle, a light, so is the soul of man; nay, it is called ‘a heavenly light.’ Is it not better to extinguish an earthly light, than a heavenly light?”

T. SHABBATH.

X.

Ceremonies and outward Ordinances to be appreciated by their inward effects and moral accompaniments; confirmed from Scripture, and further illustrated by a Tale of Rabbi Tan-chu-ma.

And rend your hearts, and not your garments.

JOEL ii. 13.

ABSTINENCE from food may mortify the body, but cannot cure the diseases of the soul. Neither can it be acceptable to God, unless accompanied by sincere repentance, and the practice of righteousness. Would you know what sort of fast is approved by God, read his word as expressed by the Prophet Isaiah.

An idolatrous and wicked king had, by his abominations, incurred the just wrath of God; and by his imprudent and impolitic conduct, brought great calamities on the

land. Oppression and tyranny produced their usual monstrous offspring—fanaticism and superstition. The people were taught by their ignorant instructors that, to appease the wrath of God, they must fast and pray; envelope themselves in sack-clothes, and strew ashes on their heads. And when they found, that notwithstanding these acts of self-mortification, their calamities still continued, they very naturally asked, “*Why fast we, and thou seest not?—afflict our bodies, and thou regardest not?*” When the Almighty ordered the prophet to tell the deluded people the real cause of their sorrows, and his displeasure. The language is so beautiful and energetic, and the subject so applicable, even to the present times, that I am induced to copy the whole.

“Proclaim aloud; give no interruption :
Loud like the trumpet’s sound, lift up thy voice :
Declare to my people their transgression ;
And to the house of Jacob their sins.
They indeed seek me daily :
Desire to know my ways :
Like a nation that practised righteousness,
And forsook not the ordinances of their God.

They ask of me just decisions,
Would wish to obtain God's favour.
Why fast we (say they), and thou seest not?
Afflict our bodies, and thou regardest not?

ANSWER.

Behold, in the day of your [fast ye gratify your
desires;
And press your sorrows upon you.
Behold ye fast for strife and contention;
And to smite with tyrannical fist.
Fast ye not that it may be known as broad day? —
That your fame may reach the very skies?
Is such then the fast I have chosen!
A day when man should humble his soul. —
What! to bend his head like a bulrush!
Envelope himself in sack-clothes and ashes!
This ye call a fast — a day acceptable to the Lord?
O! no, *this* is the fast which I choose;
To open the knots of wickedness.
To loosen the bands of oppression.
Give liberty to the groaning slave;
And break asunder every grinding yoke.
O! break thy bread to the hungry;
Bring the wretched poor into thy house:
Seest thou the naked, cover him with garments;
And hide not thyself from thy own flesh.
Then shall thy light spring forth as the morning,
And thy health quickly spring forth:

Then will righteousness go before thee,
And God's glory close thy rear :
Then shalt thou call, and the Lord will answer.
Thou shalt pray, and he will say *Here am I—&c.*

ISAIAH lviii.

Such then is the fast which the Almighty declared would be acceptable to him. To suppose then that there is any merit in mere bodily privation, is to believe in that which God has declared to be false.

Some of the ancient Rabbis have expressed the same sentiments, in language less beautiful and glowing, but scarcely less instructive. For thus we find in the days of Rabbi Tanchuma, when, in consequence of a great drought, a fast had been proclaimed. The people fasted several days, but no rain came. The Rabbi then addressed them thus:—
“ My children,” said he, “ if you wish your fast to be acceptable to God, let it be accompanied by acts of charity and good will.”
The people opened their purses, distributed money to the poor and needy. While thus laudably employed, they perceived a man give some money to a poor woman who had formerly been his wife, but was then divorced

from him. Now as the traditional law interdicted every familiar intercourse between the parties after a separation had once taken place, the people foolishly imagined that such interdiction extended even to acts of charity; and with ignorant, but vehement zeal, exclaimed, “*Rabbi! Rabbi!* what, do we sit idle spectators, and here is a great sin committed?” They then told him what they had observed. The good Rabbi, who wished to remove so destructive a prejudice from their minds, called the supposed offender before him, and questioned him about his motive. “Master,” said the charitable Israelite, “it is true I gave this poor woman some money. I saw her great distress and my heart was filled with compassion.” The virtuous Rabbi, not only did not blame this action, but greatly admired it; and in order to impress on the minds of his hearers that true charity knows no limits, no bounds, no distinction, took care to incorporate this very deed in a prayer which he addressed to the Almighty:—“Lord of all worlds,” exclaimed the pious Rabbi, “if the distress of this woman, who had no claim on the

bounty of him that relieved her, excited his compassion, *we* who are the works of thine own hands, the children of thy dearly beloved Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, what relief may we not expect from thee, *thou Father of mercies !*" God heard his prayers, there came plenty of rain, the earth was fertilized, and the distressed people relieved.

MEDRASH RABBAH.

XI.

Scripture Impartiality vindicated by Rabbi Jose.

“THE author of the books you call holy,” said a certain Roman Matron to Rabbi Jose, “appears to me very partial in his accounts of past events : nay, some of them appear incredible.—Is it possible that Joseph, a poor and wretched slave, and in the very prime of youth, could have resisted the repeated solicitations, and the alluring charms of his rich, powerful, and enamoured mistress?” — “Thou wouldest not have spoken thus,” replied Jose, “hadst thou read the books, of which thou appearest to have some knowledge, with due attention.” He then reminded her of the narratives of *Reuben* and *Bilhah*, *Judah* and *Tamar*. “These persons,” continued the Rabbi, “were superior to Joseph in age, and in dignity, yet

the divine Historian did not conceal their faults, but laid them open to the view of their descendants." It is the peculiar characteristic of our holy books to represent the actions of our ancestors with faithfulness and impartiality, neither palliating their vices nor exaggerating their virtues; that posterity might avoid the former and imitate the latter.

MEDRASH RABBAH.

XII.

The honor due to whatever is truly useful.

RABBI HUNA, once asked his son RABA, why he did not attend the lectures of Rabbi Chisda?—"Because," replied the son, "he only treats of temporal and worldly concerns."—"What," said the Father, "he occupies himself with that which is necessary for the preservation of human beings*—and this you call worldly affairs! Trust me, this is among the most estimable of studies."

T. SHABBATH.

* Chisda's Discourse, of which the young man spoke so lightly, happened to be on medicinal subjects.

XIII.

To insult Poverty or natural Defect, no venial crime.

Whosoever mocketh the poor, reproacheth his Maker.

PROV. xvii. 4.

DESPISE not the poor, thou knowest not how soon it may be thine own lot.

Despise not the deformed, their defects are not of their own seeking, and why shouldst thou add insult to misfortune.

Despise no creature; the most insignificant is the work of thy Maker.

RABBI ELIEZER returning from his master's residence to his native place, was highly elated with the great knowledge he had acquired. On his way, he overtook a singularly unshapely and misfeatured person, who was travelling to the same town. The stranger saluted him by saying, — "Peace be upon thee, Rabbi." — Eliezer proud of

his learning, instead of returning the civility, noticed only the Traveller's deformity ; and by way of joke, said to him, — " Racca*, are the inhabitants of thy town all as misshapen as thou art ?" — The stranger, astonished at Eliezer's want of manners, and provoked by the insult, replied — " I do not know : — but thou hadst better make these enquiries of the great Artist that made me." The Rabbi perceived his error, and alighting from the animal on which he rode, threw himself at the stranger's feet, and entreated him to pardon a fault committed in the wantonness of his heart, and which he most sincerely regretted. " No," said the stranger, *go first to the Artist that made me, and tell him, Great Artist, O ! what an ugly vessel hast thou produced !*" Eliezer continued his entreaties : The stranger persisted in his refusal. In the mean time they arrived at the Rabbi's native city. The inhabitants being apprized of his arrival, came in crowds to meet him ; exclaiming — " Peace be upon thee, Rabbi ! Welcome our Instructor !"

* A term of reproach.

“Whom do ye call Rabbi?” asked the stranger. The people pointed to Eliezer. “And him ye honor with the name of Rabbi!” continued the poor man: “O! may Israel not produce many like him!” He then related what had happened. “He has done wrong; he is aware of it,” said the people, “do forgive him; for he is a great man, well versed in the law.” The stranger then forgave him, and intimated that his long refusal had no other object than that of impressing the impropriety on the Rabbi’s mind. The learned Eliezer thanked him; and whilst he held out his own conduct as a warning to the people, he justified that of the stranger, by saying—that though a person ought ever to be as flexible as a reed, and not as stubborn as a cedar, yet to insult poverty or natural defect is no venial crime; and one that we cannot expect to be readily pardoned.

T. TAANITH.

XIV.

Liberality grounded on Religion not to be conquered by reverse of Fortune ; exemplified in Aben-judan.

A man's gift extendeth his possessions and leadeth him before the great.

PROV. xviii. 15.

RABBI ELIEZER, Rabbi JOSHUA, and Rabbi AKIBBA, travelled about annually in the land of Israel to collect money for the poor. Amongst their many and various contributors, none gave more liberally, nor with more cheerfulness, than ABEN-JUDAN, who was then in very affluent circumstances. Fortune, however, took a turn. A dreadful storm destroyed the fruits of his grounds ; a raging pestilence swept away the greater part of his flocks and herds ; and his extensive fields and vineyards

became the prey of his greedy and inexorable creditors. Of all his vast possession nothing was left him but one small plot of ground. Such a sudden reverse of fortune was enough to depress any ordinary mind. But ABEN-JUDAN, on whose heart the Divine precepts of his holy religion had been early and deeply imprinted, patiently submitted to his lot. —“The Lord,” said he, “gave, and the Lord has taken away;—let his name be praised for ever.” He diligently applied to cultivate the only field he had left, and by dint of great labour, and still greater frugality, he contrived to support himself and family decently; and was, notwithstanding his poverty, cheerful and contented. The year passed on. —One evening as he was sitting at the door of his miserable hut, to rest from the labours of the day, he perceived the RABBIS coming at a distance. It was then, that his former greatness and his present deplorable condition at once rushed upon his mind; and he felt for the first time the pangs of poverty.—“What was Aben-judan,” (exclaimed he,) “and

what is he now?"—Pensive and melancholy, he seated himself in a corner of his hut. His wife perceived the sudden change. —"What ails my beloved?" asked she, tenderly:—"Art thou not well?—tell me, that I may administer to thy relief!" "Would to God it were in thy power —But the Lord alone can heal the wounds which he inflicts," replied the distressed man. "Dost thou not remember the days of our prosperity, when our corn fed the hungry —our fleece clothed the naked—and our oil and wine refreshed the drooping spirit of the afflicted. The orphans came round us and blessed us—and the widow's heart sang for joy. Then did we taste those heavenly pleasures which are the lot of the good and charitable. But now, alas! we cannot relieve the fatherless, nor him who wants help, we are ourselves poor and wretched. Seest thou not yonder good men coming to make the charitable collection?—they will call—but what have we to give them?" "Do not repine, dear husband," rejoined his virtuous wife, "we have still one field left: suppose we sell half of

it, and give the money for the use of the poor?" A beam of joy overspread the good man's countenance. He followed his wife's advice, sold half the field, and when the collectors called, he gave them the money. They accepted it, and as they departed, said to him, "May the Lord restore thee to thy former prosperity!" Aben-judan resumed his former spirits, and with it his wonted diligence. He went to plough the small spot of ground still left him. As he was pursuing his work, the foot of the ox that drew the plough-share sunk into the ground, and the beast was maimed. In endeavouring to relieve the animal from its perilous situation, he saw something glittering in the hollow which the foot had made. This excited his attention: he dug the hole deeper, and, to his great astonishment and no less joy, found an immense treasure concealed in the very spot.—He took it home, removed from the wretched hovel in which he lived, into a very fine house; re-purchased the lands and possessions which his ancestors had left him, and which his former distress had obliged him to sell;

and added greatly to them. Nor did he neglect the poor. He again became a Father to the fatherless, and a Blessing to the unfortunate. The time arrived, when the before-mentioned Rabbis came, as usual, to make their collection. Not finding their generous contributor in the place where he had resided the year before, they addressed themselves to some of the inhabitants of the village, and asked them whether they could tell them what had become of Aben-judan, and how he was? “Aben-judan,” exclaimed they, “the good and generous Aben-judan! who is like him in riches, charity, and goodness? — See you yonder flocks and herds? they belong to Aben-judan. Those vast fields, flourishing vineyards, and beautiful gardens? they belong to Aben-judan. Those fine buildings? they also belong to Aben-judan.” Whilst they were thus discoursing, the good man happened to pass that way. The wise men greeted him, and asked him how he did. — “Masters,” said he, “your prayers have produced plenty of fruit,—come to my house and partake of it. I will make up the defi-

ciency of last year's subscription." They followed him to his house, where, after entertaining them nobly, he gave them a very handsome present for the poor. They accepted it, and taking out the subscription list of the preceding year. "See," said they to him,—“though many exceeded thee in their donations, yet we have placed thee at the very top of the list, convinced that the smallness of thy gift at that time, arose from want of means—not from want of inclination. It is to men like thou art, that the wise king alluded, when he said, “A man's gift extendeth his possessions, and leadeth him before the great.” Prov. xviii. 16.

JERUSALEM TALMUD.

MEDRASH VAGEEKRA RABBAH.

DEBARIM RABBA.

XV.

On Pretended Majorities.

“IT is declared in your law,” said a Heathen once to Rabbi Joshuah, “that in matters where unanimity cannot be obtained, you ought to follow the majority; and you allow that we Heathens are more numerous than you are; then why do you not follow our mode of worship?” “Before I answer thy interrogation,” replied the Rabbi, “permit me to ask thee a question: Hast thou any children?” “Alas!” exclaimed the Heathen, “thou remindest me of the greatest of my troubles.” — “Why, what is the matter?” asked Joshuah. “I will tell thee,” replied the Heathen: “I have many sons: generally speaking, they live pretty peaceably together; but when meal-time arrives, and prayers are to com-

mence, each wishes to adore his God in his own way. One invokes JUPITER, another MARS, another NEPTUNE. Each extols him whom he wishes to adore, and insists on his superiority. From words they often come to blows; so that instead of having a comfortable meal, we have nothing but confusion and quarrels.”—“And why dost thou not endeavour to reconcile them?” asked Joshua. “I might as well,” said the Heathen, “attempt to reconcile fire and water, or to smoothen the turbulent waves of the ocean.”—“I truly pity thee,” said the Rabbi; “thy neighbours are, perhaps, more fortunate?”—“Not at all,” replied the Heathen, “unless they be childless:—otherwise, the same cause produces the same effect.”—“And yet,” exclaimed Joshua, “thou callest this a majority—whose worship thou fain wouldst recommend to us! Be advised by me, good man, and before thou attemptest to reconcile others to such a mode of worship, first reconcile the worshippers amongst themselves.”

XVI.

*On the Mood of Mind that will render the
Consequences of improper Actions, the
Atonement for them.*

Despise not, my son, the chastisement of the Lord, nor murmur against his correction. For him whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, like a father who wisheth the amendment of his child.

PROV. iii. 11, 12.

FEW men pass through life, without meeting with many and various calamities. Under such circumstances, it behoves us to bear affliction with fortitude, and to resign ourselves to the will of God; who corrects as a kind father does his children, not with a view of inflicting pain, but for the purpose of amendment. This is what the Royal Moralist inculcated, and which Rabbi NAHUM confirmed by his own conduct, under the severest sufferings.

It is related of this pious man*, that he was blind and lame, unable to use his hands, his whole body was distempered, and his feet were so sore, that they were obliged to be immersed in a large basin of water, to keep off the insects. The house he lived in was in so ruinous a state, that his disciples, fearing lest it should tumble over their master's head, wished to remove him to another dwelling.—“Remove the furniture first,” said the afflicted man; “then remove me; for I am confident the house will not give way as long as I remain in it.” They did so; and no sooner had they removed the patient, when the house fell in, and became a complete ruin. “Since thou art so good a man, as to be worthy of the special protection of Providence,” said his disciples, “how comes it that thou art thus afflicted?” “I will tell you, my children,” replied their pious instructor. “I once went to pay a visit to my father-in-law; I took with me, as a present, three asses; one laden with various

* He was surnamed Gam-zu, which signifies, *this also*; because whatever happened to him, he used to say, *this is also for some good purpose*.

sorts of eatables, one with wine, and the third with various sorts of sweatmeats. Arriving not far from the place of my destination, a poor man, wretched, and almost starved, accosted me. ‘Master,’ cried he, ‘O! relieve my distress.’ ‘Wait,’ answered I, ‘until I have unloaded the asses.’—This took up some time; and scarcely had I finished unloading the animals, when the poor man dropped down dead before me. My conscience began to upbraid me. ‘Poor lamented man,’ said I, ‘a little more promptness might have saved thee; my inconsiderate delay has killed thee!’—I then threw myself on his dead body, and exclaimed, ‘O! ye eyes, that could, but would not look at the distress of the poor man, may ye be deprived of the light of day.—Ye hands, that would not reach him timely relief, O may ye have no more your wonted use.—Ye legs, that did not quickly run to his assistance, may ye no more be able to perform your usual office.—May this body too, which did not feel compassion for the wretchedness and misery of that lifeless body, feel the affliction it would not relieve.’—As I said, so it happened.

This then is the cause of my misery. The disciples, moved by this sad recital, but still more by their master's dreadful sufferings, exclaimed, "Woe be to us, to see thee in a condition so deplorable!"—"It would be much worse for me," replied their heroic instructor, "were you not to see me in this condition." Intimating, that he willingly endured his present sufferings as an atonement for his former sins, in the hope of enjoying, in the next world, that bliss which is reserved for the good and the righteous.

BAB. TALMUD, T. TANITH.

JERUS. DITTO, T. SHEKALIM.

XVII.

The Seven Ages.

THERE are few persons who have not read Shakspeare's beautiful description of the Seven Ages of Man. An ancient Hebrew sage has given us his thoughts on the same subject. His language may not appear so elegant as that of the inimitable bard ; but his sentiments are equally just, and certainly more edifying.

Seven times in one verse (said Rabbi Simon, the son of Eliezer), did the author of Ecclesiastes make use of the word *vanity**, in allusion to the seven stages of human life.

The first commences in the first year of human existence, when the *infant* lies like a king on a soft couch, with numerous attendants about him,—all ready to serve him,

* Eccles. i. 2. The word occurs twice in the plural, which the Rabbi considered as equivalent to four, and three times in the singular, making together *seven*.

and eager to testify their love and attachment by kisses and embraces.

The second commences about the age of two or three years, when the darling *child* is permitted to crawl on the ground; and like an unclean animal, delights in dirt and filth.

Then, at the age of ten, the thoughtless *boy*, without reflecting on the past, or caring for the future, jumps and skips about like a young kid on the enamelled green, contented to enjoy the present moment:

The fourth stage begins about the age of twenty, when the *young man*, full of vanity and pride, begins to set off his person by dress; and like a young unbroken horse, prances and gallops about in search of a wife.

Then comes the *matrimonial state*, when the poor *man*, like the patient ass, is obliged, however reluctantly, to toil and labour for a living.

Behold him now in the *parental state*, when surrounded by helpless children craving his support, and looking to him for bread, he is as bold, as vigilant—and as fawning too—as the faithful dog; guarding his little flock,

and snatching at every thing that comes in his way, in order to provide for his offspring.

At last comes the *final stage*, when the decrepid *old man*, like the unwieldy though sagacious *elephant*, becomes grave, sedate, and distrustful. He then also begins to hang down his head towards the ground, as if surveying the place where all his vast schemes must terminate; and where ambition and vanity are finally humbled to the dust.

MEDRASH KOHELOTH.

XVIII.

Incorruptible Treasures.

In the way of charity there is life, and her path leads to
immortality.

PROV. xii. 28.

DURING the reign of king Munbaz*, there happened to be a most grievous famine. The people had parted with their all, and were in the utmost distress. The king, touched by their affliction, ordered his minister to expend the treasures which he and his ancestors had amassed, in the purchase of corn and other necessities of life, and to distribute them

* This *Monobazus* was the son of *Helena*, queen of *Adiabene*, who, together with him and her other son, *Izates*, embraced the Jewish religion during the reign of *Claudius*, and became great benefactors to the nation.

The *Medrash Rabba* calls them the sons of *Ptolemy*. This is evidently an error. Equally erroneous are the opinions of *Jarchi*, and the authors of the *Tosephoth*, who make them the descendants of the *Asmonean* family. The curious reader will find a long account of the before-mentioned queen and her sons in *Josephus*, *Antiq. b. xx*: also a very interesting discourse on this subject in *Meor Enaim*, ch. 52

amongst the poor and needy. The king's brothers, who were not of a very generous disposition, grieved to see such vast sums of money expended, reproached him with want of economy. "Thy forefathers," said they, "took care to add to the treasures which their ancestors had left them, but thou,—thou not only dost not add, but dost squander what they have left thee." "You are mistaken, my dear brethren," replied the virtuous and generous king; "I too preserve treasures, as my ancestors did before me. The only difference is this:—they preserved earthly, but I, heavenly treasures. They placed theirs where any one might lay hold of them—mine are preserved in a place where no human hand can touch them. What they preserved yielded no fruit, that which I preserve will yield fruit in abundance.—They preserved, indeed, gold and silver; but I have preserved *lives*.—What they amassed was for others; what I amass is for my own use:—in short, they treasured up things useful for this world—my treasures will be useful in the next world."

T. BABA BATHRA.

XIX.

Table-talk of the Sages of Israel.

WHEN the son of Gamaliel was married, Rabbi Eliezer, Joshuah, and Zadig, were invited to the marriage-feast. Gamaliel, though one of the most distinguished men amongst the Israelites, waited himself on his guests; and pouring out a cup of wine, handed it to Eliezer, who politely refused it. Gamaliel then handed it to Joshuah. The latter accepted it. "How is this, friend Joshuah?" said Eliezer, "shall we sit, and permit so great a man to wait on us?"—"Why not?" replied Joshuah; "a man even greater than he did so long before him. Was not our father Abraham a very great man?—yet even he waited upon his guests, as it is written—*And he (Abraham) stood by them whilst they were eating.*—Perhaps you may think he did so, because he knew them

to be angels;—no such thing. He supposed them to be Arabian travellers*, else he would neither have offered them water to wash their feet, nor viands to allay their hunger. Why then shall we prevent our kind host from imitating so excellent an example?" — "I know," exclaimed Rabbi Zadig, "a being still greater than Abraham, who doth the same." "Indeed," continued he, "how long shall we be engaged in reciting the praises of created beings, and neglect the glory of the Creator! Even HE, blessed be his name, causes the winds to blow, the clouds to accumulate, and the rain to descend: He fertilizes the earth, and daily prepares a magnificent table for his creatures.

*The Talmud says, that they appeared to Abraham as Arabians, who worshipped the earth, for which reason he offered them water to wash away the dust from their feet. This is probably one of those inventions of which the authors of the *Agada* made use in their *exoteric* discourses, as it is doubtful whether such a nation as the Arabians existed already in the time of Abraham. But supposing it were so, what an excellent moral lesson ought we to derive from it. Here have we the beloved of God, the father of the faithful, freely and cheerfully offering food and refreshments to men whom he supposed to be unbelievers, nay idolaters! So true it is, that genuine benevolence knows no distinction of creeds.—O! ye, who glory in the name of Abraham, why do ye not always imitate his example?

Why then shall we hinder our kind host, Gamaliel, from following so glorious an example?"

T. KIDUSHIN: SIPHRI.

XX.

Destruction of wickedness, the best way of destroying wicked men; and this is the spirit of the Law and of the Prophets.

She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the instruction of kindness.

PROV. xxxi.

RABBI MEIR had some very troublesome neighbours, who took the greatest delight in doing him every mischief in their power. Vexed with their outrageous conduct, he prayed that God might destroy them. His wife heard him: "Dear husband," said she,

“ would it not be better to pray for their reform? Recollect that king David did not pray for the destruction of *sinner*s, but of *sin**, as it is written, ‘ *Let sin be consumed out of the earth, and the wicked will be no more.*’ (Psalm 104.) Pray then for their repentance, not for their destruction.” The good Rabbi approved of the advice of his wife, and thenceforth prayed that God might enlighten the minds of his troublesome neighbours, and reform their hearts.

T. BERACHOTH.

* The authorized version renders, not without some authority, the Hebrew word חַטָּאִים by *sinner*s. But the learned lady had her reasons too. For, as she well observed, if the Psalmist had meant *sinner*s, he would have used the word חַטָּאִים.

XXI.

The meek and the haughty; or the contrast exemplified in the conduct of SHAMMAI and HILLEL.

AUSTERITY of manners and harshness of disposition, are the graceless offspring of pride and arrogance. Like a chilling frost, they repel and contract whatever comes near them; and like a dark cloud they obscure and deform the most shining talents and the greatest learning; whereas humility and meekness are the lovely children of humanity and benevolence. Like the mild rays of the sun, they warm and expand whatever comes within the circle of their influence. They sweetly allure the hearts of men, throw a splendour on the most humble, and are the best ornaments of the truly great.

The truth of these maxims we find fully exemplified in the conduct of two Hebrew

Sages, who flourished in the time of *Herod* (misnamed) the great. SHAMMAI, though a man of great learning, was of a morose temper. HILLEL, in addition to his great knowledge, possessed the virtues of humility and meekness in an eminent degree. It happened that a Heathen came to the former, and thus addressed him :—“ I wish to become a proselyte, on condition that thou dost teach me the whole law, whilst I stand upon one leg.” The morose Teacher, offended at so unreasonable a request, pushed the applicant away, with the staff he held in his hand. The Heathen went to Hillel, and made the same application. The amiable Instructor complied with his request, and told him,—“ *Remember, whatever thou dislikest thyself, do not unto thy neighbours.* This is the substance of the law ; every thing else is but its comment : now go and learn.” The Heathen thanked him, and became a good and pious man.

T. SHABBATH.

XXII.

Another Example: or, the Heathen and the two Hebrew Sages.

IT happened at another time, that a Heathen passing a synagogue, heard the *Sopher* (clerk) read the following words: “*And these are the garments which they shall make; a breast-plate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a brodered coat, a mitre and a girdle,*” &c. (Exod. xxviii. 4.) The Heathen asked for whom all these fine garments were intended? — “For the High-priest,” was the answer. As soon as the Heathen heard this, he went to *Shammai*; and said, “Master, I wish to become a proselyte, but on condition that I be made a high-priest.” *Shammai* drove him away with contempt. He applied to Hillel, and made the same request. This

mild instructor of Israel, received him courteously, and thus addressed him :— “ Friend, hast thou ever known a king to be elected without being first instructed in the rules of government ? Whoever wishes to be high-priest must first be made acquainted with the rules belonging to so dignified an office. Come then, and learn.” He then taught him the 18th chapter of Numbers. When they came to the 7th verse which says, — “ *And the STRANGER that cometh nigh shall be put to death,*” the Heathen asked who was meant by the *stranger* ? “ It applies” answered Hillel, “ to any one who is not a descendant of Aaron. Even David, the king of Israel, if he had presumed to administer this sacred function, would have been punishable with death.” The man then reasoned with himself.—“ If thus the greatest of Israel is not thought worthy to fill this office, how should I, a poor miserable stranger !” He gave up the desire of becoming a high-priest ; but, by continuing to study the law, became an adopted member of that nation to whom God said, “ *Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests,*” &c.

In the course of time, they all three happened to meet together, when the grateful proselyte thus expressed himself:—“*Shammai*’s harshness almost drove me from the world; but *Hillel*’s humility saved me. May all the blessings rest upon thy head, thou worthy instructor of Israel! for it is thou who hast brought me under the wings of the Divine presence.”

T. SHABBATH.

XXIII.

The Conquest of Meekness ; or, the Wager.

ANOTHER example will still further prove the great meekness, and patient forbearance of this truly great man.

A man laid once a wager with another, that he would provoke Hillel to anger. The bet was four hundred *zuz*. * In order to make sure of it, he went to the house of Hillel, (who, it must be recollected, was at that time, next to the king, the most exalted of the Israelites,) and in a very turbulent manner called out, “Where is Hillel ! Where is Hillel !” without giving him any title of distinction. Hillel was in the act of dressing himself for the Sabbath, and without noticing the rudeness of the stranger, put on

* A Hebrew coin, value about nine pence, being the fourth part of a shekel.

his cloak, and, with his usual mildness, asked him “what was his pleasure?” “I want to know,” said the man, “why the Babylonians have round heads.”—“An important question, truly,” answered Hillel. “The reason is, because they have no *experienced midwives*.” The man went away, and came again in an hour, vociferating as before, “Where is Hillel! where is Hillel!” The Sage again threw his mantle over his shoulders, and said to him, “What dost thou want, my son.” “I want to know” said the man, “why the *Tarmudians* have weak eyes.” Hillel answered, “Because they live in a sandy country; the sand flying in their eyes causes soreness.” The man perceiving Hillel’s mildness and good nature, went away disappointed. But resolving to make another effort to provoke him, he came again in an hour, and called out “Where is Hillel! I want Hillel.” “What is thy pleasure now?” said the latter, mildly.—“I want to know,” rejoined the former, “why the Africans have broad feet?” “Because,” said Hillel, “they live in a marshy land.” “I fain would ask thee many more questions,” said the man,

“but fear thou wilt be angry.”—“Fear nothing,” said the meek Instructor of Israel, “ask as many questions as it pleases thee; and I will answer them if I can.” The man, astonished at Hillel’s unruffled temper, and fearing to lose his money, thought that the only chance left was to insult him to his face; and with this view said to him, “Art thou the Hillel, who is styled the prince of the Israelites?” Hillel answered in the affirmative. “Well then,” said the man, “if so, may Israel not produce many persons like thee!” “And why?” asked the sweet-natured Hillel.—“Because,” replied the stranger,—“because through thee I have lost four hundred ZUZ.” “Thy money is not entirely lost,” said Hillel with a smile, “because it will teach thee to be more prudent for the future, and not to make such foolish wagers. Besides, it is much better that thou lose thy money, than Hillel should lose his patience.”

T. SHABBATH.

XXIV.

True Charity dispenses her gifts in some proportion to the former condition of the distressed.—An Anecdote of MAR UKBA.

MAR UKBA was one of those chiefs of Israel, who, in addition to great learning and wisdom, was blessed with great riches ; of which no one knew how to make a better use than he. Independent of his general charity, he made it a rule to give annually to a number of poor men a certain sum, sufficient to maintain them comfortably. Amongst these, there was one to whom he used to give four hundred crowns on the day preceding the day of Atonement. It happened once, that he sent this gift by his son, who, on his return, represented to his father that he was bestowing his charity on very unworthy objects.—“ Why, what is the matter ? ”

asked Mar Ukba.—“ I have,” replied the son, “ seen that man, whom you think so poor, and who does not blush to live on charity,—I have seen him and his family indulge themselves in great luxuries ; drinking the most costly wines.” —“ Hast thou ?” replied the benevolent chief. “ Then I dare say, the unfortunate man has seen better days.—Accustomed to such good living, I wonder how he can come out with the small allowance we make him. Here, take this purse with money to him ; and, for the future, let his allowance be doubled.”

T. KETHUBOTH.

XXV.

*Filial Reverence, exemplified in the acts of
Damah, the son of Nethina.*

Honor * thy father and thy mother : that thy days may be
prolonged upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth
thee. EXOD. xx. 12.

Ye shall each of you fear † his mother and father.
LEV. xix. 3.

WORTHLESS and ungrateful must that being
be, who can forget the innumerable benefits

* Honor, &c. — By this (says the Talmud) we are en-
joined to pay every possible respect and deference to our
parents, and to avoid every thing that can, in any manner,
degrade them. If, therefore, parents happen to be poor, it
is the duty of their children to maintain them comfortably
and honorably.

† Fear. — By this is not meant that slavish fear, which
dreads the punishment and not the crime, but that awe and
reverence which superior worth and excellence ought to
inspire, and which, of course, will deter us from doing any
thing that can in any manner offend them. A child, says the
traditional law, must obey the lawful commands of his parents,
must never contradict them, nor take the place which they
usually occupy, nor call them by those names by which

conferred upon him by his parents. They are the authors of our being, the supporters of our infancy, the guardians of our youth, and the best and truest friends in our distress, and in the perplexities of manhood. They participate in our joys, share and mingle in our sorrows, and cheerfully submit to fatigues and toil, to afford us ease and comfort. Not to love them, is to violate the laws of nature ; not to honour and revere them, is to disobey the direct and special commands of God.

“Do you wish to know,” said the great Rabbi ELIEZER to his disciples (in answer to their inquiries, how far the honor of parents ex-

other persons designate them. He must obey them cheerfully, submit to their ill humour, and bear with their infirmities : so much so, that should he preside in a public assembly, clad in costly robes, and his father or mother should come and tear his garments, strike him, spit in his face, or shew him any other indignity, how painful soever such conduct may be to him, yet it is his duty not to resent it, but suffer in silence ; and recollect, that if an earthly king had given him any commission, he would cheerfully execute it ; and neither mind fatigue, nor toil, nor vexation, provided he could only accomplish the king's command : how much more, then, is it our duty to obey the divine commands of the KING of Kings, our God, blessed be his name.

But whilst the law thus enjoins obedience to children, it recommends to parents to exercise their authority with prudence and moderation, and not to lay a heavier burden upon their children than they can reasonably bear.

tends), —“do you wish to know how to honor your parents? then go and take example of DAMAH the son of NETHINA.*—His mother was, unfortunately, insane, and would frequently not only abuse him, but even strike him in the presence of his companions; yet would this dutiful son not suffer an ill word to escape his lips; and all that he used to say on such occasions, was, ‘Enough—dear mother, enough.’ Further: one of the precious stones attached to the High-priest’s sacerdotal garments was once, by some means or other, lost. Informed that the son of NETHINA had one like it, the Priests went to him and offered him a very large price for it. He consented to take the sum offered, and went into an adjoining room to fetch the jewel. On entering he found

* This Damah, as the Talmudists inform us, was a *Heathen* residing at *Ascalon*. No doubt, Rabbi Eliezer might have found numerous patterns of filial piety amongst his own nation. The reasons that induced him to select one amongst the *Heathens*, appear to me the following. First, to impress more strongly on the minds of his disciples the importance of the duty; for if a Heathen, moved only by natural impulse, conducted himself so piously towards his parent, what ought not an Israelite to do, who is urged by the most sacred and solemn commands to the performance of this duty. Secondly, that his disciples might learn to admire virtue wherever it is found.

his father asleep ; his foot resting on the chest wherein the gem was deposited. — Without disturbing his father, he went back to the Priests, and told them, that he must, for the present, forego the large profit he could make ; as his father was asleep. The case being urgent, and the Priests thinking that he only said so to obtain a larger price, offered him more money. ‘No,’ said the dutiful son, ‘I would not, even for a moment, disturb my father’s rest, could I obtain the treasures of the world.’ The Priests waited till the father awoke, when DAMAH brought them the jewel. They gave him the sum they offered the second time ; but the good man refused to take it. ‘I will not barter the satisfaction of having done my duty, for gold. Give me what you offered at first, and I shall be satisfied.’ This they did, and left him with a blessing.”

JERUSALEM TALMUD, T. PEAH.
MEDRASH DEBARIM RABBAH.
T. KEDUSHIN.

XXVI.—XXVII.

*The Double Moral and Two-fold Tale, from
the Talmud.*

1. — The MANNER no inessential part of the DEED, in acts of Duty and Benevolence.
2. — Know the MOTIVE before thou judgest of the ACT.

“SOME men,” say the Talmudists, “give their indigent parents the finest capons to eat, and yet inherit *Gehinnom*. * — Others set them to grind at the mill, and inherit *Gan-Eden*.” † To illustrate the first part of this *Apophthegm*, they relate the following :—“A certain person maintained his father, and was accustomed to provide him with the most costly viands., One day he placed before him a very fine capon. “My son,”

* Hell.

† Paradise.

said the father, "where didst thou get this fine bird?" The brute, instead of making him a proper reply, said, "Old man! old man! eat away, chew away, as other dogs do." Now such a man, though he supports his parent, yet deserves to be punished. For of what use is the best of food when it is thus mixed with gall?

To illustrate the second part of the preceding *Apophthegm*, they relate the following:—"A certain individual obtained his living by grinding at the mill. Notwithstanding his great poverty, he maintained his aged father, and would not suffer him to work. One day, as he was pursuing his laborious occupation, word was brought him that the king's officers were at the door, urging the people to come and do the king's work. Fear-

ful lest his aged parent should be maltreated, he called him and said,—“Come, dear father, take my place at the mill, and let me appear as the master of the house. Should the tyrants insult, better be it that I should be insulted than my beloved father. Should they strike, I can bear the blows better than thou; and should they strip me of my clothes, let me rather go naked than my aged father.”—Now, surely, this man, although he set his father to work at the mill, will inherit Paradise.

T. KEDUSHIN.

JERUS. TAL. T. PEAH.

XXVIII.

Past Misconduct not to prevent Compassion towards the Unhappy : Or, Rabbi José and his repudiated Wife.

“ If thy enemy be hungry, give him bread ; if thirsty, give him water : for, though thou heapest burning coals upon his head, (i. e. thou makest him sensible of the injury he hath done thee) the Lord will reward thee.”

PROV. xxv. 21, 22.

THIS is what royal wisdom taught, and what our pious ancestors practised.

Rabbi JOSE had the misfortune to be married to a perverse and quarrelsome woman, who not only did not pay him the respect due to his station, but would often insult him in the presence of his disciples. Seeing these repeated acts of aggression, they asked him why he did not divorce her, and thus get rid of so troublesome a com-

panion? “Her dowry is large, and I am poor;” replied their instructor, “and it would be unjust to send her away without restoring to her what she brought me.” One day, the rich and learned ELIEZER the son of *Asarya*, paid our Rabbi a friendly visit. Rejoiced to see this great luminary of learning, and thinking himself highly honoured by the company of so great a man, he pressed him to stay and dine with him. Rabbi ELIEZER consented. The ill-natured woman, who delighted to vex her husband on all occasions, turned her back on his friend, and, by unbecoming gestures, gave him to understand, how little she cared either for him or his friends. JOSE took no notice of her uncourteous behaviour; and mildly asked her what she had for dinner?—“Nothing,” replied his bad-tempered wife; “nothing but a few vegetables:” though she had actually prepared some very fine chickens for herself.—Rabbi ELIEZER, who easily perceived that his friend was not blessed with the best-natured woman in the world, advised him to divorce her; and

when JOSE pleaded his poverty, he gave him a very large sum of money. The woman was accordingly divorced ; and, after some time, married the beadle of the town. The man becoming blind and unable to follow his usual occupation, was reduced to such poverty, as to be constrained to beg his bread in the streets. His wife had the disagreeable task to lead him about from house to house, to excite the compassion of the well-disposed and charitable. In this degrading employment, she had sufficient pride left, to avoid the house in which her former husband resided. The unfortunate man, though blind, was not unacquainted with the character of the inhabitants of the town. He had often heard of JOSE's piety and charity, and asked his wife why she passed that good man's house? She frequently put him off with frivolous excuses ; but the question being continually repeated, she at last told him the truth : and that a sense of shame prevented her from begging at the house of which she was formerly the mistress.—

The husband being of a brutish disposition, thought this reason insufficient; insisted on being led thither; and when his wife obstinately refused it, he beat her most cruelly. She shrieked:—her lamentable cries brought a great crowd about them. The wretched woman shewed her wounds. The man justified himself by stating, that his wife injured him in his calling, and recited the great losses he experienced through her obstinacy. Amidst this uproar and confusion, JOSE happened accidentally to pass. He inquired for the cause, and no sooner was he informed of the real state of the affair, than he ordered the wants of those poor people to be immediately relieved, provided a house for them, and maintained them, out of his own scanty income, for the rest of their lives.—“Rabbi,” said his disciples to him, “Is not this the same woman that formerly made thy life so miserable?” “Yea,” answered their pious instructor; “and for that very reason I am bound to relieve her; for thus it is written: ‘Do not shut thine

eyes against thine own flesh.'—Thus practically teaching, that a tender connexion once formed, though afterwards dissolved, is never wholly forgotten by a good man: and that past misconduct is not to be recollected by us against the unhappy in the hour of their affliction.

MEDRASH BERESHITH RABAH.

VAYEEKRA RABAH.

XXIX.

*The last Words of Wisdom : Or, the Legacy
of Rabbi Jo-cho-nan to his Disciples.*

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. PSAL.cxi.

WHEN Rabbi Jo-cho-nan, the son of *Zacchai*, a man no less celebrated for his great learning than his piety, was taken ill, his disciples went to visit him. They found their venerable master in his dying moments ; his eyes bedewed with tears. Having often heard him descant on the vanity of this world, the immortality of the soul, and the great rewards reserved for the good and virtuous in the next world, they were very much surprised to see him in tears, as if regretting to leave this world ; and therefore ventured to ask him for an explanation. “ Thou light of Israel, chief pillar of the nation, and strength of the law,” said they, “ why dost

thou weep?" — "Suppose," answered their pious instructor, "suppose I were to be conducted before the tribunal of some great king, who after all is but flesh and blood, here to day, to morrow in the grave; whose anger, however vehement, cannot be eternal, — whose punishment, however severe, cannot last for ever, — who might indeed kill me, but could not deprive me of a future life, — nay, perhaps I might pacify him with words, or bribe him with money or valuable presents, — notwithstanding all which, I should tremble, fear, and weep. Now I am to be conducted before the awful majesty of the *King of kings*; before the holy and blessed *God*, who is, and liveth for ever. Whose just anger may be eternal, — who may doom me to everlasting punishment; and should he condemn me to death, it is a death without further hope. Nor can I pacify him with words, nor bribe him with money. Neither is this all: but there are two roads before me, one leading to paradise, the other to hell; but, I know not by which of these I shall be conveyed. Have I not cause to weep?" — The disciples, although

convinced of their master's piety, and the purity of his past life, yet felt the truth of his observation, and entreated him to bestow his last blessing upon them. "O! may ye," said their master, "fear God as much as one fears a mortal king, made of flesh and blood."—"Rabbi," said his disciples, "is this all, and no more?" "O!" replied the dying sage, would it were even so! Consider, my children, how tremblingly alive men are for their reputation. When a person commits a fault, does he not endeavour to hide it from his fellow creature? Would any one be guilty of a crime were he certain it would be known? And what can be hidden from the all-seeing eye of God!"

T. BERACHOTH.

XXX.

*Milton's "Dark from excess of Light,"—
anticipated and applied by R. Joshua,
in answer to a demand of the Emperor
Trajan.*

"YOU teach," said the emperor Trajan to Rabbi Joshua, "that your God is every where, and boast that he resides amongst your nation. I should like to see him."—"God's presence is indeed every where," replied Joshua, "but he cannot be seen; no mortal eye can behold his glory."—The emperor insisted. "Well," said Joshua, "suppose we try to look first at one of his ambassadors?"—The emperor consented.—The Rabbi took him in the open air at noon day, and bid him look at the sun in its meridian splendour.—"I cannot," said Trajan, "the light dazzles me."—"Thou art unable," said Joshua, "to endure the light

of one of his creatures, and canst thou expect to behold the resplendent glory of the Creator? Would not such a sight annihilate you!"

T. CHOLIN.

XXXI.

The Wilful Drunkard.

Vicious habits once contracted are seldom relinquished.

Look not at the wine (and say) O! how it reddens—how it reflects its sparkling hue in the cup—how smoothly it glides down:—It will at last bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. Strange sights will thine eyes behold; thine heart will contemplate perverse things. Yea, thou wilt be as one that lieth down in the heart of the sea, or as one that reposes on the mast's head. They beat me, (thou wilt say) I feel no pain;—they strike me, I feel it not: O! that I were again awake!—again would I drink—again seek for wine.

PROV. xxiii. 31—35.

THE drunkard, says a learned Rabbi, first parts with his money, then with his silver

vessels, saying, "Copper vessels will render me the same service." He then exchanges the copper for earthen vessels, saying, "O! they will do equally well;" and would part even with these, could he but get drink. Like all vicious habits, drunkenness clings to a man during his life, and will not leave him even on the brink of the grave.

A certain man was so addicted to drinking, that he sold even his household furniture to satisfy his depraved appetite. His sons, who had long observed their father's growing infirmity with the deepest sorrow, said, "If we permit our parent to proceed much longer at this rate, he will leave us nothing wherewith to maintain him." They employed the mildest means to dissuade him from a course so destructive and disgraceful. It was all in vain. He continued to indulge himself as usual. Resolved to leave no method calculated to produce a reform untried, they carried him one day, whilst in a state of intoxication, to the burying ground; and placed him in a cave, where the dead were usually deposited; flattering them-

selves, that on awaking from his stupor, the melancholy scenes by which he would find himself surrounded, would make him seriously reflect on his past life; that he would then abandon a habit attended with such pernicious consequences; and readily pardon them an act which, however irreverent, was solely intended for his good. With this impression they left him. On the next morning they hastened to the cave, expecting to find their parent, weak for want of food, but certainly not in a state of inebriation. Their astonishment may therefore be more easily conceived than described, when, on entering the cave, they found him sitting apparently at ease, with a flask, nearly emptied of its contents, at his mouth; whilst a number of bottles, some empty, others still full, were lying near him. They spoke to him, but could obtain no coherent answer.

It appears that some smugglers had the preceding night passed that way with a quantity of wine, which they intended to introduce into the town; but perceiving the king's officers at a distance, and fearing detection, concealed the prohibited goods in

the very cave, as a place least likely to be searched ; and went on : intending to fetch them away at a convenient opportunity. In the mean time the old man slept very soundly, little dreaming of what was going forward. Early next morning he awoke, and finding himself in so melancholy a place, surrounded by the dead, and assailed by their putrid smell, he was at first greatly terrified and alarmed ; but the same light which exhibited his gloomy situation, discovered to him the rich store that was deposited near him. The sight of so unexpected a treasure filled him with joy. He no longer thought of the dead, nor of the grave ; but opening one bottle after the other, and emptying them of their delicious contents, he became as drunk as ever. In this situation his sons found him. Overwhelmed with grief and disappointment, they exclaimed, “ Alas ! all our endeavours are vain — the disease is incurable : but he is our father ; — it is our duty to hide his infirmities. Let us take him home, supply him in a private chamber with as much as he can drink, that he may no longer be

exposed to public scorn." This they did : convinced, that ill habits once contracted, are seldom relinquished ; and that confirmed vice will not quit its unfortunate possessor, even at the brink of the grave.

MEDRASH VAYEEKRA RABAH.

XXXII.

Do not provoke those to throw off Appearances of Justice, who are too strong to be compelled to the Reality.

WHEN the ungenerous grant a favour, it is generally clogged with so many hard conditions, as to render their pretended generosity of no avail. Under such circumstances, prudence commands us to submit to our hard fate, rather than to provoke fresh insults by useless resistance.

A short time after *Trajan* had mounted the throne of the Roman Empire, the Israelites obtained his permission to rebuild the Holy Temple at Jerusalem. The Samaritans no sooner heard of it, than, with their usual malignity, they represented to the Emperor the danger of permitting the Jews to assemble again in their former metropolis, where, being once more united, they would soon shake off their allegiance. Trajan, unwilling to revoke the grant, yet fearful of the consequences, was at a loss how to proceed; when one of his counsellors suggested to him a very easy method of getting rid of his embarrassment. "Order them," said this artful adviser, "to build the intended Temple on a different spot; or to make it five cubits higher or lower than its former dimension; and you may be sure their strict adherence to the letter of the law will not permit them to avail themselves of your favour." The Emperor issued his order accordingly. This threw the people into the greatest consternation. They assembled tumultuously in the valley of *Rimmon*; and whilst some expressed their disappointment in lamentation and

tears, there were many, who madly wanted to oppose the Emperor's orders, by force of arms. The elders seeing the people in such a ferment, requested Rabbi Joshuah, whose wisdom and eloquence were well known, to appease them. The Rabbi obeyed their call, and in addressing the multitude, made use of the well known apologue of the *Lion* and the *Crane*. "The lion," said the orator, "whilst devouring his prey, accidentally got a bone in his throat. After many vain endeavours to disgorge it, he caused a great reward to be proclaimed amongst his numerous subjects, for him who should relieve his mighty majesty from the excruciating pain. Few animals ventured to undertake the operation. At last the crane offered his service. It was joyfully accepted. The feathered physician put his long neck in the lion's throat, took hold of the bone with his long bill, extracted it, to the astonishment of all the by-standers, and then demanded the promised reward. 'A reward, indeed!' said the lion contemptuously; 'Is it not sufficient reward for thee, to have permitted thy ugly neck to escape my sacred and mighty jaws?'

and askest thou now for a still further reward ? The crane thought this argument, if not convincing, very powerful ; he went his way, and was happy indeed to have escaped so imminent a danger. The application of this fable," added the eloquent Joshua, "is easy enough. Remember, dear brethren, you are under foreign subjection ; recollect your past sufferings, and think yourselves happy in the comparative ease you at present enjoy : at all events do not provoke, by vain and useless resistance, the mighty power of the Emperor." The people were instructed, and went home peaceably.

XXXIII.

The consummation of blessings is the assurance of their being retained and deserved by our posterity: Or, the Traveller and the Date-tree of the Oasis.

RABBI NACHAMAN, who was very rich, learned, and wise, requested his friend, Rabbi ISAAC, to give him his blessing. "You put me in mind," said the latter, "of a certain man, who, having travelled in a desert nearly a whole day, found himself very hungry, thirsty, and fatigued. Necessity obliged him to travel onward, till at last he came to a most enchanting spot, where grew a fine date-tree, watered by a small rivulet. The fatigued traveller seated himself in the shade of the tree, plucked some of its delicious fruit, and refreshed himself. Grateful for the unexpected relief, he thus addressed his benefactor: "Tree! tree! what

blessing can I give thee? Shall I wish thee towering branches, beautiful foliage, and refreshing shade? thou hast them already;—plenty and exquisite fruit? thou art already blessed therewith;—a refreshing stream to moisten thy root? thou hast no lack of it. The only thing I can wish thee then is, that every one of thy suckers, wherever they be planted, may flourish like thee. Now, my friend, what blessing can I give thee? Learned and wise thou art already; of riches thou hast plenty, and thy children are many. I can therefore only wish, that all thy descendants may be blessed like thee.

T. TANITH.

XXXIV.

*Old Age doubly honorable when performing
the Duties of Hope: Or, the aged Planter
and Hadrian.*

Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the
face of the old man, and fear thy God. I am the Lord.

LEVIT. xix. 32.

Even the heathens honoured old age, and shall the sons of
Abraham neglect it?

THE emperor Hadrian passing near *Tiberias*,
in *Galilee*, observed an old man digging a
large trench in order to plant some fig trees:
“Hadst thou properly employed the morning
of thy life,” said Hadrian, “thou needest not
have worked so hard in the evening of thy
days.”—“I have well employed my early
days, nor will I neglect the evening of my
life; and let God do what he thinks best,”
replied the man.—“How old mayest thou
be, good man?” asked the emperor. “A
hundred years,” was the reply. “What,”

exclaimed Hadrian, “ a hundred years old art thou, and still plantest trees ! Canst thou then hope ever to enjoy the fruits of thy labour ? ” — “ Great king,” rejoined the hoary headed man, “ yes, I do hope ; if God permit, I may even eat the fruit of these very trees ; if not, my children will. Have not my forefathers planted trees for me, and shall I not do the same for my children ? ” — Hadrian, pleased with the honest man’s reply, said, “ Well, old man, if ever thou livest to see the fruit of these trees, let me know it. Dost thou hear, good old man ? ” and with these words he left him. The old man did live long enough to see the fruits of his industry. The trees flourished, and bore excellent fruit. As soon as they were sufficiently ripe, he gathered the most choice figs, put them in a basket, and marched off towards the emperor’s residence. Hadrian happened to look out of one of the windows of his palace : Seeing a man, bent with age, with a basket on his shoulders, standing near the gate, he ordered him to be admitted to his presence. “ What is thy pleasure, old man ? ” demanded Hadrian. — “ May it please your majesty,”

replied the man, “to recollect seeing once a very old man planting some trees, when you desired him, if ever he should gather the fruit, to let you know. I am that old man, and this is the fruit of those very trees. May it please you graciously to accept them, as a humble tribute of gratitude for your majesty’s great condescension.” Hadrian, gratified to see so extraordinary an instance of longevity, accompanied by the full use of manly faculties and honest exertion, desired the old man to be seated, and ordering the basket to be emptied of the fruit, and to be filled with gold, gave it him, as a present. Some courtiers, who witnessed this uncommon scene, exclaimed, “Is it possible, that our great emperor should shew so much honour to a miserable Jew!”—“Why should I not honour him whom God has honoured?” replied Hadrian. “Look at his age, and imitate his example.” The emperor then very graciously dismissed the old man, who went home highly pleased and delighted.

XXXV.

The same things no longer the same, under altered circumstances.

MY author, in continuation, relates the following ludicrous story :— When the old man came home and exhibited the present he had received, the people were all astonished. Amongst the neighbours whom curiosity had brought to his house, there was a silly covetous woman, who, seeing so much treasure obtained for a few figs, imagined that the emperor must be very fond of that fruit; she therefore hastily ran home, and addressing her husband, said to him, “ Thou son of a wretch, why tarriest thou here? Hearest thou not that Cæsar is very fond of figs? Go, take some to him, and thou mayest be as rich as thy neighbour.” — The foolish husband, unable to bear the reproaches of his wife, took a large sack, filled with figs, on his

shoulders, and after much fatigue, arrived at the palace-gate, and demanded admittance to the emperor. Being asked what he wanted, he answered, that understanding his majesty was very fond of figs, he had brought a whole sack full, for which he expected a great reward. The officer on duty reported it to the emperor. Hadrian could not help smiling at the man's folly and impertinence:—"Yes, said he," to the officer, "the fool shall have his reward. Let him remain where he is, and let every one who enters the gate take one of the figs, and throw it at his face, till they are all gone; then let him depart." The order was punctually executed. The wretched man, abused, pelted, and derided, instead of wishing for gold, wished only to see the bottom of his bag. After much patience, and still more pain, he had his wish. The bag being empty, the poor fellow was dismissed. Dejected and sorrowful, he hastened towards his home. His wife, who was all the while considering how to dispose of the expected treasure—calculating how many fine caps, gowns, and cloaks she would purchase, and contemplating with in-

ward delight how fine she should look—how her neighbours would stare to see her dressed in silk and gold, most impatiently expected her husband's return. He came at last, and though she saw the bag empty, she imagined that his pockets at least were full. Without giving him the usual salutation, and hardly allowing him to take breath, she hastily asked him what good luck he had?—"Have patience, base and wretched woman," replied the enraged husband, "have patience, and I will tell thee. I have had both *great* and *good* luck. My great luck was, that I took to the emperor figs, and not peaches, else I should have been stoned to death:—and my good luck was, that the figs were ripe. Had they been unripe, I must have left my brains behind me.

MEDRASH VAYEEKRA RABAH.

XXXVI.

The Preposterous Snake, a Duplicate of the Belly and the Members: a Talmudic Fable.

Select from amongst you, wise men, men of understanding, well known to your tribes, and I will place them over your heads. DEUT. i. 13.

As long, says Rabbi JOSHUA BEN LEVI, as the lower orders submit to the direction of the higher orders* of society, every thing goes on well. They (i. e. the rulers)

* By the higher orders of society, our Rabbi meant those members of the state, who, on account of their wisdom, piety, experience, integrity, and disinterestedness, were best qualified to administer the laws and govern the people. It was their duty to preserve the law, which was *supreme*, and to which they themselves were subject; to administer it impartially for the benefit of the whole community; and to use the authority, with which they were invested, for the good of the public. By the lower orders he meant the rest of the people, whose interest and duty it was strictly to adhere to the law which was instituted for their preservation; and to render its authority, as well as that of its administrators, effectual, by due submission and obedience.

decree, and God confirms. The prosperity of the state is the result. But when the higher orders, either from corrupt motives, or from want of firmness, submit to or are swayed by the opinions of the lower orders, they are sure to fall together; and the destruction of the state will be inevitable. To illustrate this important truth, he related the following fable.

THE SERPENT'S TAIL AND ITS HEAD.

The serpent's tail had long followed the direction of the head, and all went on well. One day the tail began to be dissatisfied with this natural arrangement; and thus addressed the head:—"I have long, with great indignation, observed thy unjust proceedings. In all our journies, it is *thou* that takest the lead; whereas I, like a menial servant, am obliged to follow behind. Thou appearest every where foremost; but I, like a miserable slave, must remain in the back ground.—Is this just?—Is it fair? Am I not a member of the same body? Why should not I have its

management as well as thou?"—"Thou!" exclaimed the head, "thou, silly tail, wilt manage the body! Thou hast neither eyes to see danger—nor ears to be apprized of it—nor brains to prevent it. Perceivest thou not, that it is even for thy advantage that I should direct and lead?" "For my advantage, indeed!" rejoined the tail. "This is the language of all and every usurper. They all pretend to rule for the benefit of their slaves;—but I will no longer submit to such a state of things. I insist upon, and will take the lead in my turn." "Well, well!" replied the head, "be it so. Lead on."—The tail, rejoiced, accordingly took the lead. Its first exploit was to drag the body into a miry ditch.—The situation was not very pleasant. The tail struggled hard, groped along, and by dint of great exertion got out again; but the body was so thickly covered with dirt and filth, as hardly to be known to belong to the same creature. Its next exploit was to get entangled amongst briars and thorns. The pain was intense; the whole body was agitated; the more it struggled

the deeper the wounds. Here it would have ended its miserable career, had not the head hastened to its assistance, and relieved it from its perilous situation. Not contented, it still persisted in keeping the lead. It marched on,—and, as chance would have it, crept into a fiery furnace. It soon began to feel the dreadful effects of the destructive element. The whole body was convulsed,—all was terror, confusion, and dismay. The head again hastened to afford its friendly aid.—Alas ! it was too late. The tail was already consumed. The fire soon reached the vital parts of the body—it was destroyed—and the head was involved in the general ruin.

What caused the destruction of the head? Was it not because it suffered itself to be guided by the imbecile tail?—Such will, assuredly, be the fate of the higher orders, should they suffer themselves to be swayed by popular prejudices.

MEDRASH BAMID-BAR RABAH.

XXXVII.

*The Doctrine of Resurrection supported
by that of Creation.*

THERE were discovered on the fragments of an ancient tomb-stone, Greek words to the following purpose :—“ *I was not, and I became: I am not, but shall be.*” The same thought is expressed in the following reply of R. Gabiha to a Sceptic.

A Freethinker said once to R. GABIHA, “ Ye fools, who believe in a resurrection! See ye not that the living die?—how then can ye believe that the dead shall live?” “ Silly man!” replied Gabiha, “ thou believest in a creation—Well, then, if what never before existed, exists; why may not that which once existed, exist again?”

T. NEDARIM.

XXXVIII.

*Tragedy in real Life : Or the Sufferings
of the Jews under Hadrian.*

SPECIMEN 1.

OF all the tyrants that afflicted and persecuted the Jewish nation, none ever acted with greater cruelty towards them, nor made them drink deeper of the bitter cup of affliction, than the Emperor *Hadrian*. Provoked by their repeated endeavours to shake off the iron yoke which he and his predecessors had imposed upon them ; and exasperated at their heroic resistance during the siege of *Bithur*, which city they valiantly defended for a considerable time, he conceived a deadly hatred against them. After causing the most dreadful slaughter amongst them, he ordered vast numbers to be publicly sold for slaves ; and so harassed and distressed

the miserable few that were unhappy enough to escape his immediate vengeance, as to fill their minds with despair. Hence the detestation in which his memory was held amongst the early Jewish writers ; many of whom most likely felt his oppressions, and were eye-witnesses to the calamities of their brethren. The most diabolical acts of tyranny are ascribed to him ; and his name is never mentioned without maledictions. Amongst many acts of his cruelty, they relate the following :—“ He caused guards to be placed at the principal roads of *Hemath*, *Licania*, and *Bethel*. ‘ Now,’ said he ‘ if they escape from one place, they are sure to be caught in another.’ As great numbers had concealed themselves in woods, caves, and inaccessible spots, he, in order to draw them from their hiding places, ordered it to be proclaimed, that the Emperor’s anger was appeased, and that whoever wished to avail himself of the royal clemency, should appear before him, at a stated period, in the valley of *Rimmon*. Many, confiding in the royal assurance, came and presented themselves at the appointed time. The tyrant

was at dinner, in his pavilion. Beholding the assembled multitude, he said to his lieutenant — ‘Mind, I expect, that before I finish this crust of bread and the thigh of this fowl, not one of those wretches shall remain alive.’ The lieutenant obeyed; the legions were ordered to fall upon the defenceless people; and they were massacred without remorse. Those that remained concealed, escaped indeed immediate destruction, but they were reserved for still greater calamities. Hunger and want reduced them to such extremities, that they were obliged to feed on the putrid bodies of the slain. The *Medrash* relates, that two of those unfortunate men, being concealed in a cave, and their scanty stock of provision being exhausted, one said to the other, ‘Go forth, and see whether thou canst find any thing to support life.’ The man went, and found the murdered body of his father. After bedewing it with tears, and lamenting his own hard fate, he interred it, and placed a sign on the grave. He then went in search of food, but finding none, he returned to his hiding place. His companion seeing him

come home empty handed, said, ‘ Now let me go ; perhaps I may be more fortunate.’ He went, and wandered about for some time. At last he came to the spot where his companion had been before, and where he had buried his father. The man perceiving a grave, opened it, and took out the dead body, carried it home, dressed it, ate part of it, and gave some to his companion ; who, almost perishing with hunger, greedily devoured it. Having satisfied the immediate cravings of nature, he enquired of his companion where he got the body ? ‘ In such and such a place,’ answered the latter ; describing the sign he found on the grave. The man perceived too late that it was the body of his parent. He rent his garments, tore the hair of his head, and in a fit of despair, cried out—“ *Miserable and detested wretch that I am, I have fed on the mangled limbs of my own father !*”

MEDRASH ECHOH.

XXXIX.

Sufferings of the Jews under Hadrian.

SPECIMEN 2.

AS a further specimen of Hadrian's cruelty, the Medrash relates the following:—

A poor Israelite happening to pass the Emperor, greeted him with great humility and respect. "Who art thou?" demanded the Emperor. The man answered that he was a poor Jew—"How dare a miserable Jew have the impertinence to salute the Emperor?" exclaimed the tyrant; and ordered his head to be struck off.—Another Jew, hearing of this act of cruelty, and being obliged to pass the same way, thought it best not to notice the Emperor. But Hadrian perceiving him, called him, and demanded who he was?—"An unfortunate

Jew," was the answer.—“And dare a miserable Jew have the insolence to pass the Emperor without saluting him,” exclaimed the tyrant; and ordered his head to be struck off.—“Great king,” said one of the Courtiers, who happened to be present, “your conduct appears to me very strange. One person you doom to death for saluting you, and the other for not saluting you!” “Hold thy peace,” said the tyrant: “Hadrian doth not want to be taught how to distress his enemies.”

MEDRASH ECHOH.

XL.

*On Vows in cases previously binding on the
Conscience.—A Reply of Rabbi Judan.*

A CERTAIN person came to Rabbi *Judan*, and said, “Rabbi, absolve me from a vow I have made.”—“What is it then thou hast vowed?” asked the Rabbi. “I have vowed,” replied the man, “not to earn any thing.” “Not to earn any thing!” exclaimed the Rabbi; “what person can be so foolish as to make such a vow!”—“I only meant,” rejoined the man, “not to earn any thing by playing at dice.”—“And from this vow thou wouldst be absolved?” said the Rabbi. “Oh!

I see thou wishest to gamble again!—No, no, of such a vow I cannot absolve thee.”*

* “If a man,” says the law, “make a vow unto the Lord, or take an oath to bind his soul with a bond (*i. e.* he makes a vow to abstain from any thing allowable), he shall not make his word unholy (*i. e.* he must consider his word as sacred). He shall do according to all that proceeds from his mouth.”

Hence the obligation of keeping sacred our words and promises. But though the law enjoins the strict performance of a vow when made, it by no means recommends the practice of making vows; on the contrary, it discourages it. For thus it expressly says, (Deut. xxiii. 23.) “If thou forbear to make a vow, it shall be no *sin* in thee.”—From which the wise men have justly inferred, that the making of a vow, except under a very few particular circumstances, is a sin.—“Our pious ancestors,” say the Talmudists, “made neither vows nor promises, nor confirmed their words by an oath; but in all their intercourse with mankind, said, *yea, yea; nay, nay.* And indeed the impropriety of vows or oaths must appear evident to every reflecting mind. For if the performance of the intended action be praiseworthy, it requires no further incitement; if blameable, the vow can only add to the impropriety. But suppose a person, in an inconsiderate moment, makes a rash vow, of which he afterwards repents; should it be left to his own option to keep or break it, just as his own interest or inclination might suggest? The wise men thought, not: and they therefore ordained, that in all such cases, the person should make his appearance before the competent authorities, state the nature of his vow, and the motive that makes him regret it. It was then for them to judge, whether there was not a greater sin in the keeping, than in the breach; and to absolve him, or not, as they judged proper. That this power was liable to abuse, admits not of a doubt. It was, however, pretty safe in such hands as those of our pious Rabbi; and that he did not make an improper use of it, is evident from the preceding narrative.

XLI.

Poverty no Proof of Divine Disfavour. If the Poor may still call God FATHER, it must be our Duty to treat them as BRETHREN.—A Conversation between Turnus Rufus and Rabbi Akiba.

TURNUS RUFUS* put once the following question to Rabbi Akiba:—"If it be true, as I often heard you declare, that your God is the friend of the poor, then why does he not maintain them? or, in other words, why does he suffer them to languish in poverty?"—"The reason," replied Akiba, "is, that *we* may have the merit of relieving them, and thereby be saved from the torments

* Whether this is the person, who by *Josephus* is called *Terentius Rufus*, to whom the tyrant Simon, the son of Gioras, surrendered himself, or the *Tinnius Rufus* mentioned by Jerome and other authors, as the general whom Hadrian commissioned at first to march against the Jews under *Barchochoba*, I will not take upon me to decide.

of Gehinnom.”*—“ And do you,” resumed the general, “ call this a merit? I should rather call it a demerit; nay, a crime, for which you well deserve the punishment of Gehinnom. For, suppose a king were angry with one of his slaves, and ordered him into prison, there to be kept without either meat or drink; would not the king have just reason to be displeased with any one who should dare to supply the prisoner with either?” — “ Suppose, rather,” said the Rabbi, “ that the king’s displeasure were to fall on one of his own sons, and that in the moment of anger he were to order him into confinement, there to be kept without food; think you the king would be angry if any of his subjects, out of loyalty to the *Father*,

* Gehinnom, *i. e.* the valley of Hinnom, a place in the vicinity of Jerusalem, (see Joshua xv.) It was rendered notorious by the many abominations committed there under the impious reigns of several of the kings of Judah: on which account the prophet Jeremiah rebuked the Israelites, and told them, “ Behold the days will come, says the Lord, when it shall no more be called *Topheth*, nor the valley of the son of *Hinnom*, but the valley of *slaughter*,” (Jerem. vii. 32.) The place was in after-times held in such detestation, that its very name (Gehinnom) excited horror. It was probably on that account transferred to the place where the wicked are supposed to be punished after death.

were to relieve the distress of the *Son*? would he not rather reward them for it?—Besides, it is even the will of God, that we should relieve the poor: for thus he has declared by his prophet Isaiah, ‘O break thy bread to the hungry, and bring the distressed poor into thy house.’—There must, therefore, be a merit in relieving them.”

T. BABA BATHRA.

XLII.

The Good Man liberal in Justice. He not only keeps the deposit safe, but acts as the proxy of the depositor : exemplified in the hospitable Rabbi PHINEAS.

AMONGST the various virtues that adorned the ancient Hebrews, hospitality was not the least. They took pleasure in entertaining strangers, and administering to their comfort. It happened, that two travellers came to the residence of Rabbi PHINEAS, the son of YA-IR. The Rabbi bid them enter, take some refreshment, and stay with him over-night. To this they willingly consented. They had with them a few measures of barley, which they probably intended to sell the first market-day : these they gave their kind host, to save for them till their departure. Early the next morning, they took leave of the RABBI, thanking him for his hospitality,

and proceeded on their journey. But in their hurry, they forgot the barley. PHINEAS waited several days; but finding they did not return, he ordered the barley to be sown, and the produce to be taken care of. More than a year elapsed before the travellers returned. As soon as Phineas saw them, he knew them again.—“I suppose,” said he, “you are come for the barley.” “Yes Rabbi,” replied they: “when we were last here, we were so delighted with thy hospitality, that we never thought of the deposit, till we were too far off to return. But never mind the barley; we suppose it is spoiled, and hardly worth taking away.”—“You are mistaken,” said the good Phineas, “your barley is as good as ever.” He then led them to the barn, and to their great surprise and joy, delivered to them above 500 measures; the produce of that which they had left behind.

MEDRASH DEBARIM RABAH.

XLIII.

The Fox and the Fish; a fable of Rabbi Akiba.

Miserable and delusive is that Refuge, which is to be obtained by forfeiting our Claim to Divine Protection.

It was the lot of Rabbi AKIBA to live in most calamitous times. Jerusalem was in ruins; the flower of the nation had either perished during the war, or had been carried in captivity to grace the triumph of the conqueror; and the miserable remnant that was permitted to remain in their once happy, but then desolated country, groaned under the iron yoke of the Romans; who, attributing the heroic resistance which the people had made to their arms, and the obstinacy with which they had defended their country, to the spirit of their religion, wished totally to

abolish it ; and with this view forbad them its free exercise, and the study of the law. AKIBA observed the deplorable condition of his brethren ; and, fearing lest the knowledge of the law should be totally lost, ventured, notwithstanding the Roman decrees, to instruct the people in their religious duties, and to teach the law publicly. One day as he was thus laudably engaged, PAPUS, the son of JUDAH, a man well known for his learning, represented to him the imprudence of thus acting contrary to the Roman edicts ; and said to him, “ AKIBA, *art thou not afraid of this nation?*” (alluding to the Romans.) Thus wishing to deter him from so dangerous an employment, by intimating, that there are times when prudence requires us to yield to circumstances. Akiba, whose opinion was, that no circumstance whatever can justify an Israelite to forsake his religion*, being also persuaded that the calamities which the nation then experienced, were to be attributed to their iniquities, and that their only chance of

* Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and *with all thy soul*, i. e. though thy life be threatened.

deliverance, was in strictly adhering to the laws of God, said to him, "PAPUS, art thou the man of whom it is said, *he is wise?* surely thy words shew that thou art a fool:" and in order to expose to his audience the folly of that policy, commonly called *expedience*, which often sacrifices permanent good to momentary advantages, he told them the following fable.

The fox, said he, once took a walk by the side of a river, and observed the fish hurrying to and fro, in the greatest agitation and alarm. Curious to know the cause of so much confusion, he addressed himself to them, and said, "Friends, may I be so bold as to ask why you are so much agitated?" — "We are endeavouring," replied the fish, "to flee from our enemies, and avoid the many nets and snares which they have prepared for us." — "Oh! oh!" said the cunning fox, "if that be all, — I can tell you an easy way how to secure your safety. Come along with me on dry land, where we may dwell together in tranquillity, in the same manner as our an-

cestors did before us.” — The fish perceiving the treachery of their insidious adviser, said to him, “Fox! fox! art thou he who is considered as the most sagacious of animals! surely thy counsel proves thee a very great fool. If, even in our own native element, we are beset with so many dangers, what security can we expect to find on an element so repugnant to our nature, and so contrary to our habits.”

“It is even so with us,” continued the pious Rabbi*: “if, even by partially following that law of which it is said, ‘*it is thy life and length of days,*’ we experience so

* This truly great man was not permitted to exert his pious endeavours long. He was thrown into prison, and, at last, publicly executed under the greatest torments, by the order of the emperor Hadrian.

The Talmudists tell us, that after he had been some time imprisoned, it so happened, that PAPUS was thrown in the same dungeon. When Akiba beheld him, he asked him “PAPUS, what has brought thee hither?” — as much as to say, how comes it that thy time-serving policy did not protect thee? To which Papus replied: — “Happy art thou, AKIBA, who sufferest for the law — wo to me who suffer for vain things.” Thus retracting his former opinion, and acknowledging, that when our religion is in danger, it becomes our bounden duty cheerfully to lay down our lives for its preservation.

much distress and oppression, what think you will be our lot should we entirely abandon it?"

T. BERACHOTH.



XLIV.

The Climax of Benevolence ; or, the Golden Ladder of Charity : from Maimonides, after the Talmud.*

THERE are eight degrees or steps, says Maimonides in the duty of charity.

The first and lowest degree is to give,—but with reluctance or regret. This is the gift of the *hand*, but not of the *heart*.

The second is, to give cheerfully, but not proportionately to the distress of the sufferer.

* Maimonides' *Yad Hachazakah*, vol. iii.

The third is, to give cheerfully and proportionably, but not until we are solicited.

The fourth is, to give cheerfully, proportionably, and even unsolicited ; but to put it in the poor man's hand : thereby exciting in him the painful emotion of shame.

The fifth is, to give charity in such a way that the distressed may receive the bounty, and know their benefactor, without their being known to him. Such was the conduct of some of our ancestors, who used to tie up money in the hind-corners of their cloaks, so that the poor might take it unperceived.

The sixth, which rises still higher, is to know the objects of our bounty, but remain unknown to them. Such was the conduct of those of our ancestors, who used to convey their charitable gifts into poor people's dwellings ; taking care that their own persons and names should remain unknown.

The seventh is still more meritorious ; namely, to bestow charity in such a way, that the benefactor may not know the relieved objects, nor they the name of their benefactor. As was done by our charitable forefathers during the existence of

the Temple. For there was in that holy building a place called, the *Chamber of Silence or Inostentation*; wherein the good deposited secretly whatever their generous hearts suggested; and from which the most respectable poor families were maintained with equal secresy.*

Lastly, the eighth and the most meritorious of all, is to anticipate charity, by preventing poverty; namely, to assist the reduced brother, either by a considerable gift, or a loan of money, or by teaching him a trade, or by putting him in the way of business, so that he may earn an honest livelihood; and not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding up his hand for charity. And to this Scripture alludes, when it says,—“And if thy brother be waxen poor and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt *support* him: *yea, though he be a stranger or a sojourner*; that he may live with thee.” Levit. xxv. 35. This is the highest step and the summit of charity’s Golden Ladder.

* Hence probably the origin of charity-boxes.

XLV.

*Honesty not dispensable by Circumstances :
the Example of R. SIMON.*

Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression ; the same is the companion of a destroyer.
PROV. xxviii.

THERE is not an opinion more subversive of morality, and none more fertile in pernicious consequences, than that which supposes honesty and integrity to admit of gradations. Vice must remain vice, whether friend or foe be its victim. It may be aggravated but not transformed by the direction in which it moves. Nor can the eternal principles of rectitude be shaken by the contingency of circumstances. Yet, strange ! some persons think it allowable to appropriate to themselves, without previous consent, the goods of their relatives. Others think that fraud may be practised against those who have injured or deceived them ;

whilst others imagine, that the interdiction is limited to persons of their own creed! That these opinions are absurd and false, is as evident, as it is certain that Holy Writ makes no such distinctions. The most important laws on this subject are *general*, without any limitation whatever.—“*Thou shalt not steal.*”—“*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*” * —“*Ye shall not do unrighteousness in judgment, in mete-yard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just EPHA, a just HIN shall ye have,*” &c. † These and the like commands are of universal obligation. They are binding at all times, at all places, and towards all. And when the holy law does descend into particulars, it purposely specifies the very characters in respect to whom we might have imagined ourselves released from obligation. “*Thou shalt not vex the STRANGER:*” ‡ *i. e.* the man to whom thou art not bound by any particular tie or connexion. This injunction, as the ancient sages have properly explained it, means,—“that we must nei-

* Exod. xx. † Levit. xix. ‡ Exod. xx.

ther cheat nor vex the stranger, not even by words." The holy law further says:—
*"Thou shalt be ENTIRE with the Lord thy God ;"** which the same sages have explained,—"that the *heart* and *mouth* should be alike:" that is to say, that there shall be an exact correspondence between our *thoughts* and *words*:—that we should never utter any thing which we do not mean, nor make use of words calculated to produce a false impression. †

That the instructors of Israel not only taught, but likewise practised this moral rectitude, we may learn from the following examples.

* Deut. xvii.

† This the Hebrew sages called גניבת דעת a stealing of knowledge or thought, and they have considered it as a greater sin than the stealing of personal property; inasmuch as the mind is superior to the body. "He (says the Talmud) that wilfully produces a false impression on his fellow creature's mind, is as wicked as if he denied the omniscience of God."

XLVI.

Rabbi Simon, and the Jewels.

RABBI SIMON once bought a camel of an Ishmaelite: his disciples took it home; and on removing the saddle, discovered a band of diamonds concealed under it. “Rabbi! Rabbi!” exclaimed they, “the blessing of God maketh rich,” intimating that it was a God-send. “Take the diamonds back to the man of whom I purchased the animal,” said the virtuous Rabbi: “He sold me a camel, —not precious stones.” The diamonds were accordingly returned, to the no small surprise of the proper owner: but the Rabbi preserved the much more valuable jewels—**HONESTY and INTEGRITY.**

MEDRASH DEBARIM RABAH.

XLVII.

He who wrongs the Dishonest under the pretence of their Dishonesty, renders himself an Accomplice : or, Rabbi Huna reproved.

RABBI HUNA dealt in wine, of which he kept a large store. He had the misfortune to have four hundred barrels of his wine spoiled and unfit for sale. Rabbi JEHUDAH and some of the wise men went to condole with him. After expressing their sorrow at his heavy loss, they begged him to examine and review his general conduct. "My friends," said HUNA, who in fact was a very pious man, "do you then suspect me of having committed any sin deserving of so severe a punishment?" "And do you then," asked the sages in their turn, "imagine that the Divine Judge chastises without a cause?" "Well, then," said HUNA, "if you know any thing wrong of me, you had better tell me." His learned friends then told him,

they had been informed, that he neglected to give his gardeners the branches of the vines, (then considered as their legal dues.)

“It is very true,” rejoined the Rabbi; “but what crime is there in that? Know ye not that gardeners are not very honest, and that they generally take much more than their due?” “True,” said the wise men; “but do you forget what the proverb says,—He that steals from the dishonest, partakes of their plunder?” Intimating that we must act honestly, even towards those who injure us. HUNA, although rich, powerful, and learned was not ashamed to acknowledge his fault. He repaired his past errors, and thanked the wise men for the moral lesson they gave him. *

T. BERACHOTH.

* This anecdote must be taken for its prime purpose, and not to impress the erroneous, and in its consequences often uncharitable notion, that every unfortunate contingency that befalls us, is a punishment for any particular defect or wrong action.

XLVIII.

The preservation of inward dignity, and the habit of adhering to even a secret innocent resolve, will suffice to bind a good man in matters otherwise indifferent : or, that the effects on the agent's own mind is not to be omitted, in weighing the character and consequences of the action : exemplified in the conduct of Rabbi Saphra.

RABBI SAPHRA wished to dispose of one of his estates, for which he asked a certain price. An individual who had an inclination to purchase it, made him an offer, which, being much less than the real value of the estate, was refused. Some time after, the Rabbi being in want of money, resolved in his mind to accept the sum offered. In the interim the individual who had made the offer, desirous of possessing the estate, and ignorant of the Rabbi's determination, came

and proposed to give him the sum first demanded. But the good SAPHRA refused to take it. "I have," said he, "made up my mind, before thou camest, to take the sum thou didst first offer ; give it me, and I shall be satisfied ; my conscience will not permit me to take advantage of thy ignorance." *

T. BABA BATHRA.

* This strict adherence to the inward virtuous resolve of the mind, the Hebrew sages termed דבר אמת בלבו "speaking truth in the heart." — See the 15th Psalm, which contains, in a few lines, the quintessence of morality. "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle ? who shall dwell in thy holy hill ? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and *speaketh the truth in his heart,*" &c. &c.

XLIX.

Reverence for truth and simplicity not to be sacrificed to the forms of courtesy. It is truer respect to a neighbour to give him a slight pain, than knowingly to leave him under a false impression. Likewise a lesson of Rabbi Saphra.

IT happened that Rabbi Saphra took a walk with his disciples. As they went along, they met, at some distance from the town, a learned man, who, supposing that the Rabbi came purposely to meet him, thanked him for his condescension. "Do not thank me," said SAPHRA, "I only came to take a walk." The man was disconcerted, and betrayed some confusion. The disciples who witnessed what passed, asked their master, why he acted thus. "Would you then have me guilty of a falsehood?" said the pious Rabbi. "Nay," rejoined his disciples, "but thou

mightest have been silent." " My children," said the virtuous instructor, " it becomes not a son of Israel to assume a merit not due to him ; nor to cause, either by words or their absence, a false impression upon the mind of a neighbour.

MEDRASH RABAH.

L.

Not rashly to condemn our Brethren from single actions ; illustrated in the two-fold charity of the benevolent Physician, ABBA UMNA.

ABBA UMNA, a Jewish physician, was as much celebrated for his piety and humanity, as for his medical skill. He made no distinction between rich and poor, and was

particularly attentive to learned men, from whom he never would accept the least reward for his professional services: considering them as a sort of fellow-labourers, whose functions were still more important than his own; since they were destined to cure the diseases of the mind. Unwilling to deter people from profiting by his medical knowledge, yet not wishing to put any one to the blush for the smallness of the fee they might be able to give, he had a box fixed in his ante-chamber, into which the patients threw such sums as they thought proper. His fame spread far and wide. ABA-YE, who then was the chief of the Academy, heard of it; and wishing to know whether every thing reported of that benevolent man was true, sent to him two of his disciples, who were slightly indisposed. The Physician received them kindly, gave them some medicine, and requested them to stay in his house over night. The offer was readily accepted. They remained till next morning, when they departed, taking with them a piece of tapestry which had served as a covering to the couch on which they had

slept. This they carried to the market-place ; and waiting till their kind Host had arrived, pretended to offer it for sale, and asked him, how much he thought it worth ? ABBA UMNA mentioned a certain sum. — “ Dost thou not think it worth more ? ” asked the men. — “ No,” answered the Physician ; “ this is the very sum I gave for one much like it.” — “ Why, good man,” rejoined the disciples, “ this is thine own : we took it from thy house. Now tell us truly, we beseech thee, after missing it, hadst thou not a very bad opinion of us ? ” “ Certainly not,” replied the pious man ; “ ye know that a son of Israel must not impute evil intentions to any one, nor judge ill of a neighbour by a single action ; and since I was satisfied in my mind that no ill use would be made of it, let it even be so. Sell it, and distribute the money amongst the poor.” The disciples complied with his wishes, left him with admiration and thanks, and increased by their report, his well-earned fame.

But the most noble trait in this good man's character was, that he never accepted any remuneration from the poor, and even

provided them with every thing that could, during their illness, contribute to their comfort; and when he had, by his skill and assiduity, restored them to health, he would give them money, and say—"Now my children, go and purchase bread and meat; these are the best and only medicines you require."

T. TAANITH.

LI.

Folly of Idolatry.—A traditional Tale respecting Abraham.

TERAH, the father of Abraham, says tradition, was not only an idolater, but a manufacturer of idols, which he used to expose for public sale. Being obliged one day to go out on particular business, he desired Abraham to superintend for him. Abraham obeyed reluctantly.—“What is the price of that God?” asked an old man who had just entered the place of sale, pointing to an idol to which he took a fancy.—“Old man,” said Abraham, “may I be permitted to ask thine age?”—“Three-score years,” replied the age-stricken idolater.—“Three-score years!” exclaimed Abraham,—“and thou wouldest worship a thing that has been fashioned by the hands of my father’s slaves within the last four-and-twenty hours?”—

“Strange! that a man of sixty should be willing to bow down his grey head to a creature of a day!”—The man was overwhelmed with shame, and went away. After this there came a sedate and grave matron, carrying in her hand a large dish with flour. “Here,” said she, “have I brought an offering to the gods. Place it before them, Abraham, and bid them be propitious to me.”—“Place it before them thyself, foolish woman!” said Abraham; “thou wilt soon see how greedily they will devour it.”—She did so. In the mean time Abraham took a hammer, broke the idols in pieces; all excepting the largest, in whose hands he placed the instrument of destruction.—TERAH returned, and with the utmost surprise and consternation beheld the havoc amongst his favorite gods. “What is all this, Abraham! What profane wretch has dared to use our gods in this manner?” exclaimed the infatuated and indignant TERAH.—“Why should I conceal any thing from my father,” replied the pious son. During thine absence, there came a woman with yonder offering for the gods. She placed it before them.

The younger gods, who, as may well be supposed had not tasted food for a long time, greedily stretched forth their hands, and began to eat, before the old god had given them permission. Enraged at their boldness, he rose, took the hammer, and punished them for their want of respect."—"Dost thou mock me? Wilt thou deceive thy aged father?" exclaimed Terah, in a vehement rage.—"Do I then not know that they can neither eat, nor stir, nor move?"—"And yet," rejoined Abraham, "thou payest them divine honours—adorest them—and wouldst have me worship them!" It was in vain Abraham thus reasoned with his idolatrous parent. Superstition is ever both deaf and blind. His unnatural father delivered him over to the cruel tribunal of the equally idolatrous NIMROD. But a more merciful FATHER—the gracious and blessed Father of us all—protected him against the threatened danger; and Abraham became the father of the faithful.

MEDRASH BERESHITH RABAH.

LII.

Abraham's Expostulation with his tyrannical and idolatrous Judge, and his Deliverance from the fiery Furnace:—Another Legendary Tale.

ABRAHAM being brought before *Nimrod*, was urged by the tyrant to worship the fire. “Great king,” said the father of the faithful, “would it not be better to worship *water*? It is mightier than fire, having the power to extinguish it.” “Worship the water, then,” said *Nimrod*.—“Methinks,” rejoined Abraham, “it would be more reasonable to worship the *clouds*, since they carry the waters, and throw them down upon the earth.”—“Well, then,” said the impatient king, “worship the clouds, which, by thine own confession possess great power.”—“Nay,” continued Abraham, “if power is to be the object of adoration, the preference ought to

be given to the *wind*, which by its greater force scatters the clouds, and drives them before it."—"I see," said Nimrod, "we shall never have done with this prattler. Worship the wind, then, and we will pardon thy former profanations." "Be not angry, great king," said Abraham; "I cannot worship the fire, nor the water, nor the clouds, nor the wind, nor any of the things thou callest *Gods*. The power they possess is derived from a Being, not only most powerful, but full of *mercy* and *love*. The Creator of heaven and earth, Him alone will I worship."—"Well, then," said the tyrant, "since thou refusest to adore the fire, thou shalt speedily be made sensible of its mighty force." He ordered Abraham to be thrown into a fiery furnace. But God delivered him from the raging flames, and made him a source of blessing to many nations.

MEDRASH BERESHITH RABAH.

LIII.

*No loss of Dignity from any innocent Means
of promoting Peace and Harmony; or,
Rabbi Meir and the Unhoused Wife.*

Seek peace, and pursue it.

PSALM xxxiv.

RABBI MEIR was accustomed to preach publicly for the edification of the people, on the eve of the Sabbath. Amongst his numerous audience, there was a woman, who was so delighted with his discourse, that she remained until he had concluded. Instructed and pleased, she went towards home to enjoy the repast which was generally prepared for the honour of the day; but was greatly disappointed, on arriving near her house, to find the lights extinguished, and her husband standing at the door, in very ill humour. “Where hast thou been?” exclaimed he, in a tone that at once indicated

that he was not much pleased with her absence. "I have been," replied the woman, mildly, "to hear our learned Rabbi preach, and a delightful discourse it was." — "Was it?" rejoined the husband, who affected to be something of a wit: "Well then, since the Rabbi has pleased thee so much, I vow that thou shalt not enter this house until thou hast spit in his face, as a reward for the entertainment he has afforded thee." The woman, astonished at so unreasonable a demand, thought at first her husband was joking, and began to congratulate herself on his returning good humour; but she was soon convinced that it was no jest. The brute insisted on her spitting in the Preacher's face, as the sole condition of being re-admitted into the house; and as she was too pious to offer such an indignity to any person, much less to so learned a man, she was constrained to remain in the street. A charitable neighbour offered her an asylum, which was gladly accepted. There she remained some time, endeavouring in vain to mollify her husband, who still persisted in his first demand. The affair made some noise in the town, and a report of the

transaction was communicated to Rabbi Meir, who immediately sent for the woman. She came: the good Rabbi desired her to be seated. Pretending to have pain in his eyes, he, without taking the least notice of what had transpired, asked her, whether she knew any remedy for it?—"Master," said the woman, "I am but a poor ignorant creature, how should I know how to cure thine eyes?" "Well, well," rejoined the Rabbi, "do as I bid thee—spit seven times in mine eyes—it may produce some good." The woman, who believed there was some virtue in that operation, after some hesitation, complied. As soon as it was done, *Meir* thus addressed her:—"Good woman, go home, and tell thy husband—'It was thy desire that I should spit in the Rabbi's face once—I have done so, nay, I have done more, I have spit in it seven times—now let us be reconciled.'"

Meir's disciples, who had watched their master's conduct, ventured to expostulate with him on thus permitting a woman to offer him such an indignity, observing, that this was the way to make the people despise the law and its professors. "My children," said

their pious instructor, “think ye that your master ought to be more punctilious about his honour than his *Creator*? Even HE, the Adorable, blessed be He, permitted his Holy Name to be obliterated*, in order to promote peace between man and wife, and shall I consider any thing as an indignity that can effect so desirable an object?” Learn, then, that no act is disgraceful that tends to promote the happiness and peace of mankind. It is vice and wickedness only that can degrade us.

MEDRASH VAYEEKRA RABAH.
DEBARIM RABAH.

* See Numbers v. 23.

LIV.

*The Lawful Heir : or, Think Seven Times,
before thou ventarest to impute Folly to
one who has well-grounded Claims on thy
Respect and Confidence.*

In the words of the wise, wise men look beneath the
surface.

A RICH Israelite, who dwelt at a considerable distance from Jerusalem, had an only son, whom he sent to the Holy City for education. During his absence, the father was suddenly taken ill. Seeing his end approaching, he made his will, by which he left all his property to a slave whom he named, on condition that he should permit his son to select out of that property any single thing he might choose. No sooner was the master dead, than the slave, elated with the prospect of so much wealth, hastened to Jerusalem, informed the son of what had taken place,

and showed him the will. The young Israelite was plunged into the deepest sorrow by this unexpected intelligence. He rent his clothes — strewed ashes on his head — and lamented the loss of a parent whom he tenderly loved, and whose memory he still revered. As soon as the first transports of grief were over, and the days allotted for mourning had passed, the young man began seriously to consider the situation in which he was left. Born in affluence, and grown up under the expectation of receiving, after his father's demise, those possessions to which he was so justly entitled, he saw, or imagined he saw, his expectations disappointed, and his worldly prospects blighted. In this state of mind, he went to his instructor, a man eminent for his piety and wisdom, acquainted him with the cause of his affliction, made him read the will, and in the bitterness of distress, ventured to express his thoughts—that his father, by making such a strange disposition of his property, neither showed good sense, nor affection for his only child. “Say nothing against thy father, young man!” spake the pious instructor; “thy father was both

a wise man, and an affectionate parent ; the most convincing proof of which he gave by this very will.”—“ By this will !” exclaimed the young man,—“ by this will !—Surely, my honoured master, thou art not in earnest. I can see neither wisdom in bestowing his property on a slave, nor affection in depriving his only son of his legal rights.”—“ Thy father has done neither,” rejoined the learned instructor, “ but like a just, loving parent, has by this very will, secured the property to thee, if thou hast sense enough to avail thyself of it.”—“ How ! how !” exclaimed the young man, in the utmost astonishment—“ How is this !—Truly, I do not understand thee.”—“ Listen, then,” said the friendly instructor ; “ listen, young man, and thou wilt have reason to admire thy father’s prudence. When he saw his end approaching, and that he must go in the way in which all mortals must sooner or later go, he thought within himself,—‘ Behold, I must die ; my son is too far off to take immediate possession of my estate,—my slaves will no sooner be certain of my death, than they will plunder my property ; and to avoid detection,

will conceal my death from my beloved child; and thus deprive him even of the melancholy consolation of mourning for me.' To prevent the first, he bequeathed his property to his slave, whose apparent interest it would be to take care of it. To insure the second, he made it a condition that thou shouldest be allowed to select something out of that property. The slave, thought he, in order to secure his apparent legal claim, would not fail to give thee speedy information, as indeed he has done. "Well," exclaimed the young man, rather impatiently, "what benefit is all this to me? Will this restore me the property of which I have so unjustly been deprived?"—"Ah!" replied the good man, "I see that wisdom resides only with the aged. Knowest thou not, that whatever a slave possesses, belongs to his lawful master? And has not thy father left thee the power of selecting out of his property any one thing thou mightest choose? What hinders thee then from choosing that very slave as thy portion; and by possessing him, thou wilt of course be entitled to the whole property. This, no doubt, was thy father's intention."

The young Israelite, admiring his father's wisdom, no less than his master's sagacity, took the hint ; chose the slave as his portion, and took possession of his father's estates. After which, he gave the slave his freedom, together with a handsome present ; convinced at the same time, that *wisdom resides with the aged, and understanding in length of days.*

MEDRASH TANCHUMA.

LV.

Slavery.—The limited and qualified toleration of Slaves, as the less of two evils, by a law which in its whole scheme and spirit supplied a constant antidote, affords no justification of slavery under different circumstances; and much less of its abuses.

Did I ever despise the cause of my male or female slaves when they contended with me? what then shall I do when the Almighty rises up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not He that formed me in the womb form them? and did he not fashion us in the same mould?

JOB xxxi. 13—15.

THAT slavery is an evil, and an evil of great magnitude, no one possessed of common sense will for a moment deny. The divine legislator has himself acknowledged it as such, by numbering it amongst the heavy maledictions which would befall the Israelites, should they ever forsake the religion of

their ancestors ; and by the various laws which he instituted for its amelioration. That he did not entirely interdict it, we must attribute to the then state of society, which would not admit of its total abolition without introducing still greater evils. For let it be recollected, that at the period when the divine Law was first promulgated, this system of human misery had already existed for ages. The noxious weed had grown up, and flourished in its full vigour ; it overspread the fairest part of the globe, and was too deeply rooted to be at once eradicated. But although he did not entirely abolish slavery, he broke asunder some of its most tremendous shackles ; and so limited, circumscribed, and ameliorated it, that it hardly merited that odious name. There were only two extreme cases in which a Hebrew could be reduced to a state of bondage. First, when an individual guilty of theft could not make the restitution which the law adjudged, in which case the proper authorities might sell him* in order to make the required compen-

* They could only sell him for the term of six years, at the expiration of which, or at the commencement of the

sation:—Secondly, when an individual was reduced to such extreme indigence, as to prefer slavery to an actual state of starvation*, when the law allowed him to dispose of his person. In both cases, the period, as well as the nature of the service, was limited by law. The master was enjoined still to look upon the wretched man, as on a poor unfortunate brother, whose miserable condition ought to excite compassion. He dared not employ him in any very laborious or degrading work, was obliged to maintain his wife and children, though not entitled to the produce of their labour; in short he was required to treat him with such mildness and forbearance†, that the Hebrew

Jubilee, as either of them chanced to happen first, he regained his freedom.

* In such a case the individual might dispose of himself for any period; but still, when the Jubilee arrived, he regained his freedom, though the term agreed upon had not then expired. In either of the above cases the slave might redeem himself at any time, by paying the master a proportionate part of the purchase money, which the law compelled the purchaser to accept.

† Thou must not, says the traditional law, eat fine bread, and give him (the slave) coarse bread; drink fine wine, and give him an inferior sort; sleep on a bed, and let him lie on straw; but thou must in every respect treat him as thou dost thyself.

writers have justly observed, “ that he who purchases a Hebrew slave, purchases a master instead of a servant.” The heathen slave purchased by a Hebrew, was, it is true, not so well off; as neither the period, nor the nature of his service, was limited: nor could he acquire property; for whatever the slave possessed, belonged to his master. But even over him the law spread its protecting shield; for though it suspended his civil, it protected his moral and personal rights. It provided him with many opportunities by which he could gain his freedom*: it secured his life, by making the killing of a slave, or even the causing his death by immoderate correction, a capital crime, punishable with death: it protected him against cruelty, by obliging the master to give him his freedom, in case he wantonly injured any of his limbs, or even

* The heathen slave might, before he had performed an act of servitude to the purchaser, become a proselyte; and thus acquire his freedom at once. All that the purchaser could then require of him was, the repayment of the purchase money.

The master might, at any time, give him his freedom, or it might be purchased for him by any of his friends. Lastly, the master was compelled to give it him, in case he deliberately maimed his limbs, or knocked out any of his teeth.

knocked out any of his teeth ; and it sheltered him against unprovoked insults, and insured him good treatment, by that benign mildness and benevolence, which its divine precepts were so well calculated to inspire. That savage cruelty, and remorseless barbarity, which the heathens exercised towards their slaves, could never exist under the Hebrew laws : the followers of which were strictly enjoined to extend kindness even to brute animals, much more to human beings. Accordingly we find that the Israelites treated even their heathen slaves with the greatest forbearance and mildness* ; and indeed many

* Though the law, says Maimonides, did not expressly enjoin us not to treat the heathen slaves with rigour, yet piety and justice require us to be merciful and kind to them. We ought, therefore, neither to oppress them, nor lay heavy burdens upon them ; nay, we ought to let them partake of the same food with which we indulge ourselves. Our pious ancestors made it a rule to give their slaves a portion of every dish prepared for their own use ; nor would they sit down to their meals before they had seen their servants were properly provided for : considering themselves their natural protectors ; remembering what King David said, “ Behold, as the eyes of slaves are directed towards their masters, and as the eyes of the handmaid towards her mistress,” &c.

Equally improper is it to insult them, either by words or blows. The law has delivered them over to *subjection*, but not to *insult*. Nor must we bawl at them, or be in a great

of them carried their humanity so far, as never unnecessarily to rebuke them, nor to speak harshly to them, nay, they would even let them partake of the same food on which they themselves subsisted ; well knowing that a slave has feelings as well as the master ; and ever bearing in mind the words of Job, “ that the same *Maker* that formed the master formed the slave, and that they were both fashioned in the same mould.”

passion with them ; but speak to them mildly, and attend to their reasonable complaints. Such conduct Job considered as very meritorious ; as he said, “ If I ever did despise the cause of my slave or bondmaids when they contended with me, what then shall I do when the Almighty rises up ? ” &c. Cruelty and violence characterise heathen idolaters ; but the sons of Abraham — the Israelites, whom the HOLY, blessed be his name ! has so eminently distinguished by wise and just laws, ought to be kind and compassionate, and as merciful as HE of whom it is said, “ He is good to all, and his mercy extends over all his works.” Maimonides *Yad Hachzakah*, v. 4.

LVI.

Painful Recollections the best Legacy bequeathed by vicious Pleasures : Or, the Fox and the Rift in the garden-wall :— a Talmudic Fable.

“There is,” says king Solomon, “a sickening evil which I have observed under the sun, namely, riches preserved for its owner’s misfortune : and those riches lost through bad management. He brings forth a son, but nothing is left for him. Now he returns to the place whence he came, naked and bare as he came from his mother’s womb ; without the least thing for all his labour, which he might carry with him in his hands.

ECCLES. v.

THESE facts, which the Royal Philosopher stated as the result of his own experience, the learned GENEVA illustrated by the following apologue :—

“The fox,” says he, “once came near a very fine garden, where he beheld lofty trees laden with fruit that charmed the eye. Such a beautiful sight, added to his natural greed-

ness, excited in him the desire of possession. He fain would taste the forbidden fruit, but a high wall stood between him and the object of his wishes. He went about in search of an entrance, and at last found an opening in the wall; but it was too small for his big body. Unable to penetrate, he had recourse to his usual cunning. He fasted three days, and became sufficiently reduced, to crawl through the small aperture. Having effected an entrance, he carelessly roved about in this delightful region; making free with its exquisite produce, and feasting on its most rare and delicious fruit. He staid for some time and glutted his appetite; when a thought struck him, that it was possible he might be observed; and in that case, he should pay dearly for the enjoyed pleasure. He therefore retired to the place where he had entered, and attempted to get out; but to his great consternation he found his endeavours vain. He had by indulgence grown so fat and plump, that the same space would no more admit him. "I am in a fine predicament," said he to himself. "Suppose the master of the garden were now to

come, and call me to account, what would become of me! I see, my only chance of escape is to fast and half starve myself." He did so with great reluctance; and after suffering hunger for three days, he with difficulty made his escape. As soon as he was out of danger, he took a farewell view of the garden, the scene of his delight and trouble; and thus addressed it:—"Garden! garden! thou art indeed charming and delightful, thy fruits are delicious and exquisite; but of what benefit art thou to me? What have I now for all my labour and cunning?—Am I not as lean as I was before!"

It is even so with man. Naked comes he into the world—naked must he go out of it: and of all his toils and labour he can carry nothing with him, save the fruits of his righteousness.

MEDRASH KOHELETH.

LVII.

*Alexander and the Female Chief; a moral
Tale in honor of women:—*

Beware how thou addest what may subtract of what thou
already hast.

Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what
to do in the end, when thy neighbour hath put thee to
shame.

PROV. XXV. 8.

ALEXANDER, the Macedonian, whose mad ambition knew no bounds, and whose thirst of dominion torrents of human blood could not assuage, after having subdued numerous nations, desolated the fairest part of the globe, and covered the earth with mourning, was far from being contented with his vast dominions. He still sighed for new conquests, and was as restless and as ambitious as ever. Returning from his Indian expedition, he took it in his head to pene-

trate into the interior of Africa. He communicated his design to some Hebrew philosophers who then were in his camp. “Thou canst not go thither,” said the sages: “there are the dark mountains*, which intervene, and which cannot be passed.” — “I do not ask you,” said the head-strong chief, “whether the thing be possible or not. You know I am accustomed to conquer difficulties. My desire is, to know how to proceed.” “Well then,” replied the philosophers, “get some Libyan asses, that are accustomed to walk in the dark†; bind them with pliable ropes‡, the ends of which keep in thine own hand§; then direct, and follow.” Alexander took their advice, commenced his march, and after traversing barren wastes and dreary deserts, arrived at length in a well cultivated country; which was chiefly inhabited and governed by women. Alexander was on

* Alluding to the inaccessible rocks and dreary deserts.

† Alluding perhaps to the mercenary soldiers, who are accustomed blindly to follow the impulse given by their leader.

‡ By this they probably meant a strict and well regulated discipline, without which an army cannot long subsist.

§ By this they intimated that he must keep the chief command in his own hand.

the point of assailing their chief town, when a female, distinguished from the rest of her companions by her lofty stature and noble mien, stepped boldly forward ; and after respectfully saluting Alexander, inquired, what might have brought him to their secluded country.—“ I am come,” replied the impetuous chief, “ to fight and to conquer.”—“ Great king !” exclaimed the prudent heroine, “ what ! art thou come to fight with females ! Are then the men all dead, that thou comest to shew thy valour against women ? Trust me, the thought of conquering us is more easy than the deed. Besides, it becomes a wise man well to calculate the consequences of an enterprise before he undertakes it. Now ; grant thou conquerest us, will this tend to thy glory ? Will it not after all be said, the mighty Alexander has killed a few helpless women ? But should fortune turn against thee, and we should prevail, with what shame and disgrace will it not sully thy renown ! Will it not then be said, the great warrior, the conqueror of the world, has at last been subdued—ignominiously subdued, by the hands of women ?

Leave us, then, in the undisturbed possession of our own country, and turn thy mighty arms against more worthy enemies." Alexander, struck by her intrepidity, and still more by the justness of her observations, held out his hand to her in token of peace, and only requested permission to place the following inscription on the gates of the chief city:—
I, Alexander the madman, after having conquered so many nations, have at last come to this country, and learned wisdom from women. *

T. TAMID.

* Whether the Talmudists have taken this from the well known story of the Amazonian Queen, I cannot tell: but they have at all events given us a very instructive lesson.

LVIII.

Ambition humbled and reproved: Or, Alexander and the Human Skull.—A moral Allegory.

The grave and destruction can never have enough, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied. PROV. xxvii. 20.

PURSUING his journey through dreary deserts, and uncultivated ground, Alexander came at last to a small rivulet, whose waters glided peaceably along their shelving banks. Its smooth unruffled surface was the image of contentment, and seemed in its silence to say—this is the abode of tranquillity and peace. All was still: not a sound was heard save those soft murmuring tones which seemed to whisper into the ear of the weary traveller—“Come, and partake of nature’s bounty!”—and to complain that such offers should be made in vain. To a contemplative mind,

such a scene might have suggested a thousand delightful reflections. But what charms could it have for the soul of an Alexander, whose breast was filled with schemes of ambition and conquest; whose eye was familiarized with rapine and slaughter; and whose ears were accustomed to the clash of arms—to the groans of the wounded and the dying?—Onward, therefore, he marched. Yet, overcome by fatigue and hunger, he was soon obliged to stop. He seated himself on one of the banks of the river, took a draught of water, which he found of a very fine flavour, and very refreshing. He then ordered some salt fish, with which he was well provided, to be brought to him. These he dipped in the stream, in order to take off the briny taste, and was very much surprised to find them emit a very fine fragrance. “Surely,” said he, “this river, which possesses such uncommon qualities, must flow from some very rich and happy country.—Let us march thither.” Following the course of the river, he at length arrived at the gates of Paradise. The gates were shut. He knocked, and, with his usual impetuosity, demanded

admittance. — “Thou canst not be admitted here,” exclaimed a voice from within; “*this gate is the Lord’s.*” — “I am the Lord — the Lord of the earth;” rejoined the impatient chief — “I am Alexander the Conqueror! Will you not admit me?” — “No,” was the answer. “Here, we know of no conquerors — save such as conquer their passions: *None but the just can enter here.*” Alexander endeavoured in vain to enter the abode of the blessed; neither entreaties nor menaces availed. Seeing all his attempts fruitless, he addressed himself to the guardian of Paradise, and said; — “You know I am a great king — a person who received the homage of nations. Since you will not admit me, give me at least something, that I may show an astonished and admiring world that I have been where no mortal has ever been before me.” “Here, madman!” said the guardian of Paradise, “here is something for thee. It may cure the maladies of thy distempered soul. One glance at it may teach thee more wisdom than thou hast hitherto derived from all thy former instructors. Now go thy ways.” Alexander took

it with avidity, and repaired to his tent. But what was his confusion and surprise to find, on examining the received present, that it was nothing but the fragment of a human skull. "And is this," exclaimed Alexander, "the mighty gift that they bestow on kings and heroes? Is this the fruit of so much toil, danger, and care?" Enraged and disappointed, he threw it on the ground. "Great king!" said a learned man who happened to be present, "do not despise this gift. Despicable as it appears in thine eyes, it yet possesses some extraordinary qualities, of which thou mayest soon be convinced, if thou wilt order it to be weighed against gold or silver." Alexander ordered it to be done. A pair of scales was brought. The skull was placed in one, a quantity of gold in the other; when, to the astonishment of the beholders, the skull over-balanced the gold. More gold was added, still the skull preponderated. In short, the more gold there was put in the one scale the lower sunk that which contained the skull. "Strange!" exclaimed Alexander, "that so small a portion of matter should outweigh so large a mass of gold!

Is there nothing that will counterpoise it?" "Yes," answered the philosophers, "a very little matter will do it." They then took some earth, covered the skull with it, when immediately down went the gold, and the opposite scale ascended. "This is very extraordinary!" said Alexander, astonished. "Can you explain this strange phenomenon?" "Great king," said the sages, "this fragment is the socket of a human eye, which, though small in compass, is yet unbounded in its desire. The more it has, the more it craves. Neither gold nor silver nor any other earthly possession can ever satisfy it. But when it once is laid in the grave and covered with a little earth, there is an end to its lust and ambition."

T. TAMID.

MEDRASH RABAH.

FACETIÆ.

FACETIÆ.

LIX.

*Wit, like Salt; a little goes a great Way;
or, the Jest of a Hebrew Child.*

“THERE, my lad,” said an Athenian once to a little Hebrew boy, by way of joke, “Here is a *Pruta*,* bring me something for it, of which I may eat enough, leave some for my host, and carry some home to my family.’ The witty boy went and brought him salt. “Salt,” exclaimed the Athenian, “I did not tell thee to bring salt!” “Nay,” replied the boy, archly, “Didst thou not say, bring me of what I may eat, leave, and take some home?—Verily, of this thou mayst eat, leave some behind, and still have plenty to carry home.”

MEDRASH ECHOH.

* A small coin, of less value than a farthing.

LX.

The word "Us," includes the Hearer as well as the Speaker.

AN Athenian once said to a Hebrew lad, "Here, my boy, is some money; bring *us* some figs and grapes."—The boy went and purchased the fruit, and giving half of it to the stranger, kept the other half for himself. "Is it customary here, for a messenger to take half of what he fetches?" said the Athenian, rather surprised: "No," answered the boy; "but our custom is to speak what we mean, and to do as we are desired."—"But," rejoined the stranger, "I did not desire thee to take half the fruit?"—"O!" replied the boy, shrewdly, "what else couldst thou mean by saying *bring Us*? Does not that word include the *Hearer* as well as the *Speaker*?" The Athenian smiled, and was contented.

MEDRASH ECHOH.

LXI.

*The Tailor and the broken Mortar ; or, the
Jest retaliated.*

Answer the fool according to his folly.

PROV. xxvi.

AN Athenian, going along the streets of Jerusalem, found a broken iron mortar.—Wishing to exhibit his wit, he entered a Tailor's shop, and addressing himself to the master, said, “ Master, be so kind and put a patch upon this mortar.” “ I will,” said the Hebrew, “ as soon as thou wilt make me a few threads of this material ”—giving him a handful of sand.

MEDRASH ECHOH.

LXII.

Witty Retort of a Hebrew Child.

“ FETCH me some cheese and eggs,” said an Athenian once to a little boy : the boy did as he was desired. — “ Now, my boy,” said the stranger, “ tell me which of these cheeses were made of the milk of white goats, and which of the milk of black goats ! ” — “ Thou art older than I, and more experienced,” replied the shrewd little Hebrew : “ tell me first which of these eggs came from white, and which from black hens.”

LXIII.

The inhospitable Jester taken in his own Snare.

He who intends to circumvent others, teaches cunninger men a lesson to his own damage.

AN inhabitant of Jerusalem coming to Athens on some particular business, entered the house of a merchant, with a view of procuring a lodging. The master of the house, being rather merry with wine, and wishing to have a little sport, told him, that by a recent law, they must not entertain a stranger, unless he first made three large strides towards the street. "How shall I know," rejoined the Hebrew, "what sort of strides is in fashion amongst you? Show me, and I shall know how to imitate you." The Athenian made one long stride, which brought him to the middle of his shop—the next brought him to its threshold—and the third carried him

into the street. Our traveller no sooner perceived it, than he shut the street door upon the Athenian.—“What,” cried the latter, “do you shut me out of my house?”—“Thou hast no reason to complain,” replied the Hebrew, “I only do that to thee, which thou didst intend to do unto me.”—Remember, that he who attempts to circumvent another, has no right to complain of being himself circumvented.

MEDRASH ECHOL.

LXIV.

*The Enigma that cost the Athenian his
Mantle.*

AN Athenian went once into a Hebrew school where there were a number of boys. The master being absent, the stranger entered into a conversation with the pupils; proposed many questions, to which they returned suitable answers. As he was on the point of departing, some of the boys said to him, — “Come, let us make an agreement that whoever is unable to make a reply to a question proposed, shall forfeit his cloak.” — “Agreed,” said the Athenian. “Since thou art the oldest,” said the pupils, “it is but fair that thou shouldest have the priority.” “No,” said the Athenian, “make you the proposition, as I am only a stranger.” They

then proposed the following enigma. — “*Nine go out, eight come in ; two pour out ; one drinks ; and four and twenty wait upon him.*” After several fruitless endeavours, the Athenian acknowledged he could not tell the meaning ; and was under the necessity of giving up his cloak. Departing from thence, he met the master of the school. “ Rabbi,” said the Athenian, “ what a shocking custom is this of your’s, when a stranger comes amongst you, you strip him of his clothes. Is this your hospitality ?” He then told him, how the pupils had deprived him of his cloak. — “ Perhaps,” said the Rabbi, “ there was a cause for it.” The stranger related to him the real facts. “ Well,” said the Rabbi, “ do not be vexed : I will tell thee the interpretation. The *nine* that go out, embrace the period of man’s embryo life : — The *eight* that come in, are the eight days of circumcision : — The *two* that pour out are the two living fountains, which God has provided for the nourishment of infants : — The *one* that drinks, is the *child* that sucks : — The *twenty-four waiters* are the four and

twenty months allowed for between its birth and its weaning."—The Athenian thanked him, returned, and redeemed his cloak. *

MEDRASH ECHOH.

LXV.—LXVIII.

The Quadruple Tale : Or, Rabbi JOSHUAH instructed.

"No person," said Rabbi JOSHUAH, "ever conquered me (in wit), except two children,—a little girl and a widow." He then related the following tales.

* This story is given as illustrating the customs and manners of ancient times.

1.

The Wise Child.

More than the mile-stone must be consulted in deciding which is the shortest way.

ONCE on my travels, I came near a town where the road separated to right and left. Not knowing which to take, I enquired of a little boy who happened to be there, which of the two led to the town. “Both,” replied he; “but that to the right is *short* and *long*—that on the left is *long* and *short*.” I took that on the right; but had not far advanced, when my progress was stopped by a number of hedges and gardens. Unable to proceed, I returned, and asked the little fellow, how he could be so cruel as to misdirect a stranger? “I did not misdirect thee,” replied the boy. “I told thee what is true. But art thou a wise man amongst Israel, and canst not comprehend the meaning of a child?—It is even as I said. This road is the nearest, but still the longest, on account of the many obstructions. Unless thou would-

est trespass on other people's ground, which I could hardly suppose from so good a man. The other road is, indeed, more distant, but it is, nevertheless, the shortest, being the public road ; and may, therefore, be passed without encroaching on other people's property."—I admired his wit, and still more his good sense, and went on.

2.

THE LITTLE BOY.

Impertinent Curiosity repressed.

ARRIVING in the city, I met another little boy carrying a covered dish. "What hast thou in that dish, child?" demanded I.—"My mother would not have covered it, master, had she been willing that its contents should be known;" replied the little wit!—and went on. *

* This simple tale contains a moral, applicable to subjects of the highest import. It is no mean part of knowledge to

3.

The Little Girl kind and witty.

ANOTHER time, during my travels, I came near a well, where a little girl was drawing water. Being very thirsty, I asked for a draught. She handed me the pitcher.—“Drink,” said she, “and when thou hast done, I will draw some for the beast on which thou ridest.” I quenched my thirst, and the good girl gave some to the poor animal. As I departed, I said, “Daughter of Israel! thou hast imitated the virtuous example of our good mother Rebekah.”*—“Rabbi,”

know the boundaries within which the desire of knowledge should be limited; whether by the nature of the human faculties, or by the calls and duties of our particular spheres.

The wise *son* of *Sirach* has given us some excellent maxims on this subject:—“Seek not the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength: contemplate that which is allowed thee; for it is not needful for thee to know things that are hidden: be not curious in unnecessary matters,” &c.

ECCLESIASTICUS iii.

* And when she (Rebekah) had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking: And she hasted and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.

GEN. xxiv. 19, 20.

said the little girl, (with a smile, that indicated the most kindly feelings, and that the reply was a mere play of wit.)—"Rabbi, if I have imitated the example of Rebekah, thou hast not imitated that of the faithful Eliezer."*—Kind maiden, thought the Rabbi, thou possessest already more valuable ornaments than the most faithful servant can bestow—Wit, Innocence, and Good nature.—May the Lord continue to bless thee. †

* And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man (Eliezer) took a golden ear-ring of a half shekel weight, and two bracelets for the hand, of ten shekels weight of gold (and gave them to her). GEN. xxiv. 22.

† It is one beauty of this pleasant little tale, that the tender age assigned fixes our attention exclusively on the *intellectual* quickness of the little respondent.

4.

THE WIDOW.

Great learning no excuse for want of good manners: or, the Widow's delicate reproof.

I HAPPENED once to take up my lodging at the abode of a widow. She prepared something for my dinner, which she placed before me. Being very hungry, I eat the whole, without leaving the customary remnant for the servants.* The next day I did the same. The third day, my hostess, wishing to make me sensible of the impropriety of my conduct, so overseasoned the dish she had prepared for me, that it was impossible to eat it. Ignorant of what had

* It was a custom amongst the ancient Hebrews to leave a portion in the plate for the use of the waiters or servants, that they might partake of the same food as the rest of the family.

been done, I began to eat ; but finding the food so very salty, I laid down the spoon, and made my repast on bread. “Why eatest thou not of what has been prepared for thee?” asked my hostess.—“Because I am not hungry,” answered I.—“If so,” rejoined she, “why eatest thou bread? Do people eat that by way of desert.—But,” continued she, with a significant smile, “I can perhaps guess thy motive. Thou leavest this for the poor servants whom thou didst, yesterday and the day before, deprive of their due! Is it not so Rabbi?” I was humbled, and I acknowledged my fault.

T. ERUBIN.

MEDRASH ECHOH.

LXIX.

The Athenian and his one-eyed Slave.

AN Athenian went to study at Jerusalem. After remaining there three years and a half, and finding he made no great progress in his studies, he resolved to return. Being in want of a servant to accompany him on his journey, he went to the market-place and purchased one. Having paid the money, he began to examine his purchase more closely, and found to his surprise that the purchased servant was blind of one eye. "Thou blockhead," said he to himself — "see the charming fruits of thy application. Here have I studied three years and a half, and at last acquired sufficient wisdom to purchase a blind slave !" — "Be comforted," said the person that sold the slave ; "trust me, though he is blind of one eye, he can see much better than persons with two." The Athenian

departed with his servant. When they had advanced a little way, the blind slave addressed his master—"Master," said he, "let us quicken our pace, we shall overtake a traveller, who is some distance before us." "I can see no traveller," said the master.—"Nor I," replied the slave; "yet I know he is just four miles distant from us."—"Thou art mad, slave! How shouldest thou know what passes at so great a distance, when thou canst scarcely see what is before thee?"—"I am not mad," replied the servant, "yet it is as I said; nay, moreover, the traveller is accompanied by a she-ass, who like myself is blind of one eye: she is big with two young, and carries two flasks, one containing vinegar, the other wine." "Cease your prattle, *loquacious fool*,"—exclaimed the Athenian.—"I see, my purchase improves: I thought him blind only; but he is mad in the bargain."—"Well, master," said the slave, "have a little patience, and thou wilt see I have told thee nothing but the truth." They journeyed on, and soon overtook the traveller; when the Athenian, to his utmost astonishment, found every thing

as his servant had told him ; and begged him to explain how he could know all this without seeing either the animal or its conductor. — “ I will tell thee, master,” replied the slave. “ I looked at the road, and observing the almost imperceptible impression of the ass’s hoofs, I concluded that she must be four miles distant ; for beyond that, the impression could not have been visible. I saw the grass eaten away on one side of the path, and not on the other ; and hence judged she must be blind of one eye. A little further on, we passed a sandy road, and by the impression which the animal left on the sand where she rested, I knew she must be with young. Further, I observed the impressions which the liquid had made on the sand, and found some of them appeared spungy — whilst others were full of small bubbles, caused by fermentation, and thence judged of the nature of the liquid.” The Athenian admired the sagacity of his servant, and thenceforth treated him with great respect.

MEDRASH ECHOH.
T. SANHEDRIN.

LXX.

The scientific Carver.

A JERUSALEMITE went once on particular business, to a certain place in the country, where he was suddenly taken ill. Seeing himself on the point of death, he called the master of the house, begged him to take care of his property until the arrival of his son; and for fear of imposition, not to deliver it to him, unless he first performed three clever things as a proof of his wisdom. After the lapse of a considerable time, the son arrived at the place; knowing the name of the person with whom his father usually resided, but ignorant of the particular street in which he lived, he in vain endeavoured to find it out, as the people refused to give him the desired information. Whilst thus embarrassed and perplexed how to proceed, he espied a person with a heavy load of wood on his shoulders. "How much for that wood?" asked the

stranger. The man mentioned a certain sum. "Thou shalt have it," said the Hebrew: "go and carry to that man's house (mentioning the name of the person of whom he was in quest), I will follow thee." The man did as he was desired. Arriving at the house, the carrier put down his load. "What is all this?" said the master of the house; "I have not ordered any wood."—"True," said the carrier; "but the person behind me has." In the mean time the stranger arrived, informed the master who he was, adding, as no one would acquaint him with the place of his abode, he contrived this stratagem in order to discover it. "Thou art a clever fellow. indeed," said the host,—bade him enter, and insisted on his staying with him till the next day. The offer was thankfully accepted. Dinner was prepared; the cloth laid. The company, consisting of the master, his wife, two daughters, two sons, and the stranger, were seated; and the servant brought a dish containing five chickens, which was placed upon the table. "Now," said the host to his visitor, "be so kind and carve." The latter begged at first to be excused, but at last complied;

and executed the office in the following manner:—One of the chickens he divided between the master and his wife; another between the two daughters; the third between the two sons, and the remaining two he took for his own share.—“A very strange way of carving this!—My visitor must needs be a great glutton,” thought the master within himself, but said nothing. The afternoon and evening were passed in various amusements, and when supper-time arrived, a very fine capon was placed upon table. “Thou hast performed the honours of the table so well this day,” said the kind host to his visitor, “that I must request thee to carve again.”—Our visitor took the capon before him, cut off its head, and placed it before the master; the inward part he gave to the mistress of the house; to the two daughters he gave each a wing; to the two sons a leg each; and kept the whole remainder to himself. “Upon my word,” said the master, “this is too bad; I thought thy manner of carving at dinner very strange, but this is still more extraordinary. Pray is this the way they carve at Jerusalem?” “Have patience, until I explain

myself, and my conduct may perhaps not appear quite so strange," replied the visitor: "At dinner, five chickens were placed before me; these were to be divided amongst seven persons. As I could not perform the operation with mathematical exactness, I thought it best to do it arithmetically. Now thou, thy wife, and one chicken, made up the number *three*; thy two daughters and a chicken made another *three*; thy two sons and a chicken made again *three*. To make up the last number I was compelled to take the remaining chickens to myself; for two chickens and thy humble servant made again *three*. Thus have I solved this difficult problem." "Thou art an excellent arithmetician, but a bad carver," said the master; "but proceed." The stranger continued: "In my carving in the evening, I proceeded according to the nature of things. The head being the principal part of the body; I therefore gave it thee, since thou art the head of the family. To thy wife I gave the inward part as a sign of her fruitfulness. Thy two sons are the two pillars of thy house; the legs which are the supporters of the animal, were therefore their

proper portion. Thy daughters are marriageable, and I know thou wishest to see them well settled, I therefore gave them *wings*, that they may the sooner fly abroad. As for myself I came in a boat, and intend to return in a boat; I therefore took that part which most resembles it." — "Very well done," said his kind host; "I am satisfied thou art the true son of my departed friend. Here is thy property: now go and prosper."

MEDRASH ECHOH.

LXIX.

No Rule without Exception.

RABBI ELIEZER, who was as much distinguished by the greatness of his mind as by the extraordinary size of his body, once paid a friendly visit to Rabbi *Simon*. The learned *Simon* received him most cordially, and filling a cup with wine, handed it to him. *Eliezer* took it, and drank it off at a draught. Another was poured out—it shared the same fate. “Brother *Eliezer*,” said *Simon*, jestingly, “rememberest thou not what the wise men have said on this subject?” “I well remember,” answered the corpulent *Eliezer*, “the saying of our Instructors—‘That people ought not to take a cup at one draught:’ But,” added he jocosely, “the wise men have not so defined their rule as to admit of no exception: and in this instance, friend *Simon*, there are no less than three. The *Cup* is *small*—the receiver large—and your *wine* so *delicious*!”

JERUSALEM TALMUD.

APHORISMS

AND

APOPTHEGMS.

APHORISMS AND PROPOSITIONS

If you wish to know how much profitable
distinction is to gold, then observe what labour
— If you change gold, you get silver for it,
but your gold is gone; — but if you exchange
the sort of *wisdom* for *power*, you obtain
fresh knowledge, and, at the same time, keep
what you possessed before.

A word is like milk, which, being once
drawn from its original source, can never be
obtained again.

If thou lackest knowledge, what hast thou
then acquired? Hast thou acquired know-
ledge? — what else dost thou want? —

Men think themselves the wise man,
and utter the foolishness. The wise man

APHORISMS AND APOPTHEGMS.

IF you wish to know how much preferable wisdom is to gold, then observe what follows:—If you change gold, you get silver for it, but your gold is gone;—but if you exchange one sort of wisdom for another, you obtain fresh knowledge, and, at the same time, keep what you possessed before.

A word is like milk, which, being once drawn from its original source, can never be returned again.

If thou lackest knowledge, what hast thou then acquired? Hast thou acquired knowledge?—what else dost thou want?—

Seven things characterise the wise man; and seven the blockhead. The wise man

speaks not before those who are his superiors either in age or wisdom. He interrupts not others in the midst of their discourse. He replies not hastily. His questions are relevant to the subject ; his answers, to the purpose. In delivering his sentiments he takes the first in order, first; the last, last. What he understands not, he says "I understand it not." He acknowledges his errors, and is open to conviction. The reverse of all this characterises the blockhead.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue."

"What care," said Rabbi ZIMRA, "has not the All-wise Creator bestowed on the chief organ of speech?—All the other principal members of the human body are situated externally, and that either upright or pending. The tongue alone is placed internally and in a horizontal position, that it might remain quiet and steady. Nay, that it might be kept within its natural bounds, he has encompassed it with two walls ; one of ivory*, the

* The teeth.

other of softer substance.* Further, to allay its intense ardour, he has surrounded it with an ever-flowing rivulet.† Yet, notwithstanding all this Divine care, what mischief does it not do?—how many conflagrations does it not raise!—and what destruction does it not cause!

Calumny.

The serpent was once asked—“Pray what profit hast thou in depriving other beings of their life? The lion kills and eats; the wolf strangles and devours; other savage beasts destroy to satisfy their ravenous appetite. But thou alone strikest the innocent victim, and infusest thy deadly venom without any other gratification, save the fiend-like pleasure of destroying!”—“And why do you ask me?” replied the serpent: “rather ask the *Calumniator*—What pleasure has he in scattering his poison and mortally wounding those who never injured him? Besides, *I*, kill only those that are near me. *He*, de-

* The lips.

† The salivary glands.

stroys at a distance. He scatters his vile slander here, and it inflicts deadly wounds at *Rome*.

Benevolence.

Simon the Just*, one of the last members of the great assembly †, was accustomed to say, “The stability of the world (*i.e.* society) depends on three things—namely, *the* LAW—RELIGIOUS WORSHIP,—and ACTS OF BENEFICENCE.”

OBSERVATION.—Without law, society could not possibly exist: all would then be anarchy and confusion. Without religion, men would, at best, be nothing but cunning beasts, whom even the strong arm of the law could hardly restrain: and religion, without acts of beneficence, deserves not that sacred name.

* He was so named on account of his pre-eminent justice.

† This great assembly (Synagoge Magna) consisted of one hundred and twenty members, eminent for their learning and piety: constituted by Ezra, the restorer of the Jewish religion.

“ Let the honor of thy associate,” says Rabbi Eliezer, “ be as dear to thee as thine own. Be not easily provoked to anger : and repent one day before thou diest !” *

“ This world,” says Rabbi Jacob, “ may be regarded as an anti-chamber to the next. Prepare thyself in the anti-chamber, that thou mayst be admitted into the saloon.” †

“ Contemplate three things,” says Akav-ya, the son of Mahalaleel, “ and thou wilt not easily be led to sin. Consider whence thou comest—whither thou goest—and before whom thou must ultimately render an account of thine actions. Thou comest from vile matter—goest to a place of dust and vermin ‡—and must render an account before the King of kings.”

* When his disciples asked him how it was possible to know that day ? He replied, “ Well, since it is so difficult, it behoves us to be always prepared, and to repent as soon as we have committed an error.”

† That is to say,—be virtuous in this, that you may inherit the next world.

‡ Alluding to the body.

“ The best line of conduct a man can adopt,” (says Rabbi Jehudah the Holy), “ is that which gains him the esteem of others without depriving him of his own.” *

“ Be as careful to observe a trivial precept as one that is more important †; for thou knowest not the reward of virtuous deeds.”

“ I have passed the greater part of my life,” said Simon, the son of Gamaliel, “ in the society of the wise; and found nothing more becoming the man of wisdom than *silence*. It is not the *preaching*, but the *practice*, which ought to be considered as the most important. A profusion of words is sure to produce error.”

* *i. e.* of which conscience approves.

† That is, observe a degree of propriety in all thy actions, and neglect not even the least of thy duties. Say not, this or that act is of no importance; for the most trivial actions may lead to important results. “ *Thou givest,*” says the Talmud in another place, “ *a penny to a poor man; the gift is trivial, and the act may appear unimportant; yet it may keep him from starving, and save a life.*”

“ Be cautious in your intercourse with the great,” says Rabban Gamaliel ; “ they seldom confer obligations on their inferiors, but from interested motives. Friendly they appear, as long as it serves their own turn, but they will render no assistance in time of actual need.”

Rabbi Tarphon was accustomed to say, “ The day* is short — the work † abundant — the labourers ‡ inactive — the reward § great — and the master of the house || urges on.”

He was also accustomed to say, “ It is not at all requisite for thee to finish the work ¶ ; nor art thou at liberty to neglect it.

* Life. — † The duties. — ‡ Mankind. — § Immortality. — || God.

¶ EXP.—It frequently happens, that even well disposed persons are deterred from laudable exertions by the consideration, that the good, which can be produced by their individual efforts, is too insignificant to have any material influence on the general happiness of society. Such men our Rabbi admonished to recollect, that it is not required of any one *to finish the work*, but to lend a helping hand towards its completion. Society may, in this respect, be compared to a vast and complicated machine, some parts of which are subordinate to others, and contribute in different degrees to the result of the whole ; but unimportant as those parts may appear when separately considered, they are nevertheless equally and indispensably necessary. A single

Hast thou acquired much knowledge in the law?—thy reward will be proportionably great. He that employs thee, is sufficiently trustworthy to pay the wages of thy labour. But recollect, that the reward of the righteous is in a future state.”

cog of a simple wheel, in such a machine, is no doubt but a small part of its mechanism, and can contribute but a small portion to the effect of the entire work ; yet the want of its co-operative influence may, if not entirely stop, yet greatly impede its motion. It is even so with regard to the duties we owe to society. Separately considered, the good which individual exertion can produce, bears but a small portion in the scale of human happiness ; yet, as this happiness can only be effected by the aggregate good of individual effort, no person can either be privileged or exempted from contributing his share towards it.

אם אין אני לי מי לי ובשמי לעצמי מה אני
ואם לא עבדו אימתי :

“If I am not for myself,” says the pious Hillel, “who is to be for me?—If I am for myself only—what am I then? *—And if not now, when then?” †

“Be,” says the same good man,” a disciple of Aaron ‡ : a lover of peace, and a pro-

* *Explanation.* Man as a social being has various duties to perform; some relating to his individual welfare, others to the welfare of society. If he neglect the former how can he expect that others, less interested, will perform them for him. If he neglect the latter, and studies only his own interest, he becomes a *selfish* creature, scarcely deserving the name of *man*. A good man will neglect neither: and this is what the pious Rabbi wished to inculcate.

† By this the Rabbi recommends promptness in the execution of our duties:—since life is uncertain, and procrastination dangerous.

‡ Tradition says, that Aaron was a great lover of peace, and that he used to promote it with all his power. Whenever he found people at variance, he endeavoured to reconcile them by his friendly interference.

moter thereof. Love mankind, and draw them in a friendly manner * to the study of the law."

He was further accustomed to say:—

"He that is ambitious of fame destroys it. † He that increases not his knowledge diminishes it. ‡ He that endeavours not to obtain some learning, incurs the penalty of death. § He that uses the crown of learn-

* The words of the law are truth : and truth knows no other language than mildness and persuasion. Every harsh or violent measure must fail. Persecution may force compliance, but cannot produce conviction.

† The love of fame may incite us to great and noble actions, but cannot render us truly virtuous : Because virtue knows no other motive than that of doing good. Fame follows in its noble train, but is never its object. Besides, it is well known, that those who are fond of fame are not very choice in the means of acquiring it : and when their real motives are once discovered, instead of obtaining applause, they receive the contempt of mankind ; and thus defeat their own purpose.

‡ Even the strongest impressions are liable to be effaced from the memory. The best preservative against this intellectual malady, is the enlargement of our knowledge. It is an incontestible fact, that every additional mental acquisition, so far from weakening or impairing the faculties of the mind, rather strengthens and invigorates them ; and renders the knowledge already acquired more solid and lasting.

§ In what consists our superiority over the rest of animal beings — if not in knowledge ? It is this that makes life

ing * as an instrument of gain, will pass away."

"It is most desirable," says Rabban Gamaliel, "to have a knowledge of the world, in addition to the knowledge of the law.† Their alternate employment makes sin to be forgotten." ‡

so truly valuable. "Every human being, who makes use of the means which God has placed at his disposal, may acquire, at least, a certain portion of it. He therefore who totally neglects it, is guilty of *moral suicide*.

* Religious knowledge is too sacred to be used for mercenary purposes. It ought to be as freely and as disinterestedly imparted, as it was communicated by its divine author.

† By a knowledge of the law, the Hebrew writers meant a knowledge of the Divine Law, together with its necessary interpretation. By worldly knowledge, they meant, that which relates to society in general; its constitutions, customs, and manners; and above all, the knowledge of some art, trade, or profession, from which we may derive a decent and honest livelihood. Different as are these two sorts of knowledge, yet are they equally necessary for our moral perfection; and like twin brothers, they ought to go hand in hand. The first teaches us our duties; the second furnishes us with opportunities, and means of exercising them. The one promotes our spiritual, the other our temporal welfare. The Rabbi therefore justly considered the attainment of both as most desirable.

‡ Besides, as the Rabbi further observes, their joint acquisition, by the various and constant employment which they afford, relieves the mind on one hand, from that langour which continual meditation and study are apt to produce; and on the other, from that vacuity which generally accom-

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“Learning, without active employment, ceases ultimately, and causes sin.”*

panies a cessation from labour, and which so often gives birth to sins and crimes. The mind thus alternately employed can have no leisure to think of mischief.

‡ The ascetic may shut himself up in his cell, deprive himself of worldly enjoyment, consume his life in meditation and study, and pride himself on the vast stock of knowledge he accumulates, but of what benefit is he to society? none: nor doth he benefit himself. His seclusion incapacitates him for the active duties of life; his inactivity subjects him to indigence and poverty, the parents of so many temptations and crimes. Reduced to mendicity, he gradually loses the learning he may have previously acquired, and above all that *honest independence*, which is one of its best ornaments. It is blessed competency, that renders a man useful to himself and to society; and this can only be acquired by labour and industry. Hence the great importance which the ancient Rabbis attached to honest occupations and industrious habits.

“He,” says the Talmud, “*who teaches not his child an art or profession by which he may gain an honest livelihood, teaches him to rob the public.*” Again, though the Sabbath is to be distinguished from ordinary days by better food, better raiment, &c. yet, “*Live rather on that as on common days, than be beholden to the charity of thy fellow creatures.*”

Further—“*Strip a carcase of its skin, even in the market-place, rather than have recourse to beg. Say not, I am a priest, I am the son of a great man, how can I condescend to such low employments; for, degrading as these may appear, it is still more so to hold thy hand up for charity.*” Nor was it by words only that they communicated these wholesome instructions; they did it much more effectually by their own examples. The virtuous *Hillel*, that great ornament of Israel, did not think it beneath him to support himself by cutting of wood. *Karna*, a judge in the

Holy Land, maintained himself by carrying water; and when the people came before him to have their disputes decided, the only recompence he required of them was to get a person to carry the water for him, whilst he attended to their affairs. Rabbi *Huna* was a dealer in wine. Rabbi *Jochonan* followed the trade of shoemaking; Rabbi *Isaac*, that of a blacksmith. Rabbi *Joseph* maintained himself by carrying wood; and used facetiously to say, "*Happy labour! it both warms and nourishes those that are engaged in it.*" Thus did those pious men stoop to the lowest employments, rather than become burthensome to their respective communities. No wonder, then, that their instructions sunk deep in the minds of the people, and made a lasting impression on them. Happy age! when no honest occupation was thought degrading, and labour was an ornament to virtue.

THE END.

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